

BATTLE ON THE BOOKSHELVES:
HISTORY, DESERT STORM, AND THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES

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General Studies

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ABSTRACT

BATTLE ON THE BOOKSHELVES: HISTORY, DESERT STORM, AND THE UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES, by MAJ Michael R. Eastman, 121 pages.

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Drawing from the theory of organizational politics, this study examines the use of history by the American armed forces during three distinct periods: the defense reorganization of the late 1940s, the Reagan military buildup of the 1980s, and the years following the decisive American-led victory in Desert Storm. It shows how the services have increasingly considered history as an effective way to shape perceptions of their past accomplishments and influence future decisions regarding roles, missions, and budgets.

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ACRONYMS

DSSG	Desert Storm Study Group
GWAPS	Gulf War Airpower Survey

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In reading Army accounts of the 1991 Gulf War, one could reasonably come away with the impression that despite some forty days of aerial bombardment, the Republican Guard represented a significant threat that only carefully synchronized ground actions would finally subdue. Review statements and histories from the Air Force, however, and you leave with a much different interpretation, in which the elite Iraqi armored formations are a beaten foe, yearning for the Army to appear so they could throw down their arms and surrender. Consult the Marines, and the vaunted “left hook” of the Army fades into the background while the liberation of Kuwait City takes on the character of the main effort. Depending on which history of Desert Storm a reader happens to consult, three very different versions of a single war emerge from three professional military organizations trusted to provide sound advice and analysis to our elected civilian leaders. It is this phenomenon that sits at the heart of this study.

At their most basic level, the United States armed forces are professional bodies raised, equipped, and trained for a single purpose: to fight and win a nation’s wars. The measure of their success is in victory or defeat on the field of battle. However, modern militaries are also large, sophisticated, political bodies. They react to a set of incentives common to nearly all government bureaucracies. They value larger budgets, autonomy within their professional sphere, and predictability in an environment that frequently threatens the funding flows and political stability bureaucracies strive to maintain.¹ Most of the time, the potential overlap between the professional and political nature of the armed forces represents no danger to either the organization or the society it serves.

However, when the professional expertise of a military service is used to advance the bureaucratic aims of the organization, it raises interesting and understudied questions.

This work addresses one such question by examining the ways in which the United States armed forces have used or even abused history in their efforts to influence political decisions over the past fifty years. After tracing the general approaches towards history taken by the armed forces immediately after the World War II and then again during the military buildup under Ronald Reagan, I specifically examine military efforts to shape elite perceptions of their respective service's contributions in Desert Storm.

The issue at hand requires more than simply validating the accuracy of the armed forces' accounts of their wartime performance. Consider the difficulties posed by the United States' victory over Iraq in the first Gulf War. American superiority over the decidedly outmatched Iraqi forces is apparent to even the most casual student of history. The very lopsided nature of the American victory, however, itself poses problems for any objective analysis of American armed forces in this campaign. Because so many factors impacted on the outcome of the war, ranging from superior American technology to flagging Iraqi morale, each of the armed services is free to claim that it played the key role in defeating the Iraqi resistance and then to stake that claim on a body of professional knowledge that few outside the military have the expertise or standing to refute. To some extent, each service has chosen to do so.

In the absence of bureaucratic incentives, this practice might be written off as simple professional disagreement over generally objective analysis. However, modern militaries are undeniably political organizations, and for a military organization success in war is the coin of the realm. Any perception that a military organization was either

extremely successful or of marginal importance in a past conflict promises significant repercussions for future decision making at the strategic level. The sincere belief that strategic airpower was decisive in the Persian Gulf, for instance, could and arguably has led decision makers to assign airpower the central role in future campaigns against a mechanized, ground-based opponent. As one group of British scholars recently noted, this potential outcome was not lost on the leadership of the United States armed forces in the aftermath of Desert Storm. Instead, “the war taught the United States that, in spite of all the noble efforts, a wasteful, pernicious, destructive competition continues among the US military branches.”² In this case, the competition was over elite perceptions of the war itself.

The problem confronting most civilian leaders is that determining how each service actually performed during a modern conflict is exceptionally difficult. As political scientist Eliot Cohen identified in a 1995 study of the Army, “the incredibly esoteric nature of military power, which is difficult enough for soldiers, let alone civilians, to understand,” can serve as a source of friction between the military and its civilian leaders.³ Because American political leaders are increasingly unfamiliar with the military and lack the expertise to determine the effectiveness of the armed forces in battle, they risk depending solely upon the military and its trusted agents for assessing each service’s performance.⁴ This practice can hardly be relied upon for objective results.⁵ In fact, as the simple example drawn from Gulf War histories demonstrates, the opposite is normally true. Nor is this a new problem. As Richard Betts has noted, “the tendency for opposing schools of thought to find self-justifying evidence in the same cases is illustrated by the

recurrent debates over the military effectiveness of aerial bombardment,” a debate which has continued for the better part of a century.⁶

Despite arguments to the contrary, there are clear organizational incentives for the various branches of the armed services to highlight their respective contributions in combat. To expect them to do otherwise completely ignores the bureaucratic half of their nature. By focusing specifically on the various approaches to history taken by the United States armed forces since World War II, this thesis will add to the general understanding of both the political nature of the modern military and the surprisingly widespread practice of parochial historical interpretation.

Importance of the Issue

Understanding the practice of shaping perceptions through military history is important for several reasons. First, it is critical to confirm that different versions of the same historical events exist between the armed services. Not only do civilian leaders make strategic decisions based on the belief that a true account of what happened in war exists, but they often look to the military as a primary repository of expertise capable of making these assessments. If official versions of history are biased to further organizational objectives, civilian leaders should be made aware of the practice.

Second, if military services consistently distort their combat performance for self-serving organizational reasons, this represents an understudied aspect of civil-military relations. Contemporary works in this field focus on the active resistance of senior military leaders to distasteful missions, most recently by their appeals to members of congress or in critical editorials directly to the American public. The manipulation of history to shape the future assignment of missions, though decidedly more subtle, could

have an equally large impact at the strategic level. For instance, if a service succeeds in overstating its effectiveness in urban warfare in a previous conflict, it seems far more likely to receive future missions involving urban fighting, regardless of whether or not it is truly the right organization for the job. A similar logic applies to weapons systems. The penalties for organizational ambition would then be paid in lives and materiel.

Finally, related to the issue of effectiveness is the question of intent. From the comparison of autobiographical accounts, official histories, and congressional testimony, it is important to determine whether any of the armed services make a conscious effort to portray themselves in a particular light to government elites. Identifying such patterns in the interpretation of history by the armed forces raises additional questions concerning the state of civil-military relations and the proper balance between parochialism and objective analysis.

The field of organizational politics identifies clear incentives for bureaucracies to highlight their own achievements at the expense of their political rivals. Selective or distorted interpretations of past events present one way for military leaders to do this, pushing political elites towards strategic decisions viewed as desirable. However, there are contending explanations for this practice that must also be considered. The most likely is that service culture plays a critical role in the way a military organization both perceives and reports on its own wartime accomplishments. If an organization places a premium on individual bravery, for instance, then it should not be surprising if vignettes of individual heroism dominate its official accounts of a campaign. Therefore, as part of this work, it is necessary to determine the impact of organizational culture on the observed behaviors.

Assumptions

The central argument of this thesis hinges on a few key assumptions. The first is that, under specified conditions, military organizations behave in the same ways as other government bureaucracies. At the strategic level, they respond to similar incentives and pursue similar goals, which includes asserting some measure of control and predictability over the future missions they are likely to be assigned. This assumption is critical because there is very little direct evidence to be found showing senior military leaders deliberately pursuing organizational objectives. For obvious reasons, general officers do not testify before congress about their desire to inflate their service's effectiveness in battle in order to safeguard a role in the next war. To admit so publicly would be do great damage to both the leader and the organization. Furthermore, the decision to highlight a service's accomplishments is usually taken with the best intentions by the parties involved. The senior leaders involved have no nefarious plan, but are simply true believers in their own organization.

Nonetheless, there is good reason to believe that military organizations adhere to predictable patterns of behavior. The field of organizational politics accepts that "all organizations seek to have influence in order to pursue their other objectives. Those that have large operational capabilities seek influence on decisions, in part, to maintain the capability to perform their mission."⁷ Assuming that the United States armed services respond to the same incentives as other bureaucracies allows for the application of theories drawn from organizational politics as a way to explain and predict behavior. It also permits this study to move beyond first-order questions of why a military might behave in this way and concentrate instead on questions of how and how effectively.

The second assumption underpinning this work is that there is some measure of tacit approval between military organizations and the researchers they chose to work with in telling their story to the public. Official histories aside, it is quite likely that the unofficial accounts of warfare have an equal, if not greater, effect on the perceptions of decision makers regarding a service's wartime performance. Granting interviews and battlefield access to selected writers provides a way for the armed services to influence the content and tone of their story as it is told to the American people, and indirectly to their elected leaders. To think that the selection of these trusted agents is done without careful consideration is highly implausible.

Once again, though, there is no direct evidence to confirm this belief. Senior leaders are not likely to publicly confess to choosing sympathetic authors in an effort to place their organization in a positive light, nor are the writers themselves likely to admit to producing anything other than objective analysis. By assuming that this linkage between military organizations and trusted agents exists, it is possible to expand the study of actions taken to shape public perceptions beyond the official histories and congressional testimony to include the impact of non-official military literature as well. In this way, the study incorporates both official and selected unofficial historical accounts of wartime performance, but links them in a common organizational strategy.

A final core assumption is that each arm of the United States military speaks with a single voice on decisions to shape elite perceptions of wartime achievement. This assumption is made only to simplify the analysis for this study. There are well-established intra-service competitions within each of the armed services. To believe these differences are easily overcome in order to craft a monolithic version of past events

overlooks the interests each sub-group within a service has for advancing its own cause. There are also dominant personalities that periodically rise to positions of leadership within the military. These individuals have an unquestionable impact on the political tactics of the organization. However, given the lack of detailed academic study of this practice, I have chosen to simplify the concept of the military organization to a single entity in the interest of developing broad, first-order conclusions.

Mapping the Argument

In this work, I will contend that the United States armed forces have each looked to history to shape elite perceptions of their effectiveness in Desert Storm to influence the political decisions regarding roles, missions, and budgets. The effectiveness of their actions has varied, with the Air Force enjoying the greatest success of the four branches and the Army the least. In addition, I will demonstrate how this behavior is to be expected from any bureaucracy operating in an environment marked by scarce resources and intense political competition. The extent to which the services have manipulated history in the past was clearly impacted by the political pressures each felt at the time. Finally, the evidence will show that modern American military organizations have grown increasingly sensitive to political incentives, and the manipulation of history to achieve organizational objectives is fast becoming a universal practice. Behavior that began primarily in response to external political pressures is increasingly the product of politically savvy military culture. Differences that remain between the services are largely matters of effectiveness in shaping perceptions rather than intent.

This study is conducted in three stages. First, I construct a framework for analysis based on the literature of organizational politics. I argue that under the right conditions,

military services behave much like all other government bureaucracies. Consequently, this approach to understanding the behavior of organizations is particularly appropriate during times of interservice conflict over budgets, roles and missions. The second section describes organizational practices of the armed forces during two earlier periods of political conflict: the immediate aftermath of World War II and the height of the Reagan Buildup. I place particular emphasis on evidence that the services utilized history during this period as a component of their organizational strategy. The remainder of the paper analyzes the various ways in which the United States. armed forces tried to shape elite perceptions of their performance during Desert Storm. The study concludes with a brief assessment of the methods used by each of the services to influence elite perceptions and implications the practice has for both the military organizations and the political leaders that they serve.

¹Morton Halperin, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1974), 26-62.

²Bruce Watson, Bruce George, Peter Tsouras, and B. L. Cyr, *Military Lessons of the Gulf War* (London: Greenhill Books, 1991), 218.

³Eliot Cohen, "Making Do With Less, or Coping with Upton's Ghost," (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 1995): 20.

⁴While civilians are clearly capable of first-order assessments of success or failure, determining the critical variables that led to specific outcomes in battle are increasingly outside their expertise.

⁵Aaron Wildavsky, "The Self-Evaluating Organization," *Public Administration Review* 32 (September/October 1972): 509-520.

⁶Richard Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 203.

⁷Halperin, 27.

CHAPTER 2

AN ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

Before examining how military organizations have portrayed their wartime accomplishments to their civilian political leaders, a necessary first step is outlining a theoretical framework for understanding the behavior of government bureaucracies in a more general sense. The field of organizational politics provides one such way to explain and predict the behavior of government agencies. Despite the armed services' dual nature as both professions and government bureaucracies, organizational politics is arguably as applicable to the military services as it is to the more traditional government bureaucracies it is frequently used to explain. In fact, organizational politics has been the dominant approach of scholars studying the behavior of the armed services in recent years.¹

Although the armed services certainly demonstrate aspects of both profession and bureaucracy, it is the latter that drives their behavior during periods of political uncertainty. In the United States, the aftermath of war has traditionally been just such a time, marked by military downsizing, reevaluation of service effectiveness, and budgetary battles. For organizations that measure their health in terms of "growth in budget, manpower, and territory [jurisdiction]," these conditions are most likely to elicit a bureaucratic response.² One need only consider the organizational maneuvering and bitter infighting between the services during the massive reorganization of the defense establishment in the late 1940s.³ If there is ever an appropriate time to study American military behavior in organizational rather than professional terms, it is during such moments of greatest uncertainty.

In this chapter, selected core tenets of organizational politics will be briefly described. The essence of the respective military services is identified, along with those actions that the theory of organizational politics predicts the armed forces will pursue as they compete with one another during periods of postwar change. Finally, this chapter attempts to explain how the misrepresentation of historical events by the military services, whether conscious or not, is actually quite rational behavior when viewed from an organizational politics perspective. Much like the motivated biases that have afflicted militaries as they struggle to influence how a future war will be fought, interservice battles over how well the armed forces actually performed constitutes another likely reaction from military organizations during periods of political competition.⁴

The Framework of Organizational Politics

Any attempt to understand and predict the behavior of the military services must be grounded in some theoretical basis. Fortunately, as political scientist Barry Posen asserted in his 1984 study on military doctrine, “organization theory can be used to explain organizational behavior wherever we find large, functionally specialized bureaucracies.”⁵ This section briefly defines the key terms and behaviors predicted by the theory of organizational politics before applying it specifically to the American military services.

A bureaucracy, in the classic sense, is defined by three general characteristics. First, it must administer some fixed jurisdictional area according to a recognized set of rules or principles. Second, a bureaucracy must be governed by an internal hierarchy of some sort. Finally, only individuals who meet specific internally determined qualifications validating their ability to perform assigned duties occupy positions of

authority within the bureaucracy.⁶ Applied loosely, the title of bureaucracy can be applied to nearly all modern government agencies, to include the military services.

According to the theory of organizational politics, the behavior of bureaucracies tends to converge around a few basic principles, to include a preference for stability over uncertainty and a desire for autonomy within the jurisdictional sphere. Underpinning these principles is the concept of organizational essence. Coined by Morton Halperin in the 1970s, the term organizational essence refers to “the view held by the dominant group in the organization of what the missions and capabilities should be.”⁷ In other words, the term defines what the senior leadership of an organization believes it exists to do, its “self-concept.”⁸ For example, the State Department’s organizational essence might be defined by diplomacy and the peaceful resolution of international disagreements. Regardless of how it is formulated, the concept of essence serves as the touchstone for all organizational behavior.

Once an organizational essence develops within a bureaucracy, its senior leadership acts according to predictable patterns in order to safeguard it. An organization will favor policies that make it appear more important or effective in the jurisdictional area defined by its essence, while resisting missions that might draw resources or energy away from what are viewed as core tasks. Organizational leaders will mount fierce struggles to resist losing functions seen as essential, yet react indifferently to the loss of functions that are not compatible with their organization’s essence. This may hold true even if the responsibilities lost require a decrease in funding. Finally, organizations will tend to seek autonomy and stable budgets. These things are not valued for their own sake, but for the increase in control they provide to the organization as it attempts to safeguard

its essence.⁹ For example, stable funding flows allow for more predictable planning and procurement. Autonomy within a jurisdiction relieves the organization from competing with other agencies to perform core tasks, while simultaneously providing it the latitude to define both procedures and measures of success within its respective field.

That does not mean that government bureaucracies fail to evolve over time. There is ample evidence of organizations adapting to emerging technology or to changes in the strategic environment.¹⁰ One need only consider the Air Force's adoption of the strategic nuclear bombing role or the Navy's shift from battleships to aircraft carriers. However, organizational politics does suggest that bureaucracies are inherently conservative when it comes to defending their essence. Their "priorities, perceptions, and issues are relatively stable" over time.¹¹ Bureaucracies react to changes in the environment, be they political, economic, or technological, in ways that allow the organization to preserve their essence even if the processes used to perform key tasks differ markedly over time.

Each of these organizational practices can be observed in periods of relative stability. They are simply the mark of bureaucracies going about their daily business in a political environment characterized by constant competition for resources and influence. However, as might be expected, organizational behavior is even more pronounced during periods when the essence appears to be at risk. While bureaucracies jealously guard their jurisdiction in times of relative stability, they are apt to react even more aggressively when they perceive a threat to their essence from another organization.¹² The same applies to changes in the political environment that endanger funding, challenge organizational effectiveness, or consider the redistribution of roles and missions from one organization to another.

In cases where the performance of an emerging task or mission overlaps multiple jurisdictions, or when a bureaucracy perceives a competitor to be infringing on a task previously viewed as its own, organizations tend to behave according to similarly predictable patterns.¹³ In conflicts over roles and missions, organizations will often exaggerate the effectiveness of their own efforts at the expense of their competitors. They will stubbornly resist any action that might serve to increase the influence or jurisdiction of a competitor.

Shared responsibility for a mission can also serve as a source of conflict. Unity of command all too frequently takes a backseat to the search for ways to assume full control by one of the ostensible partners. Additionally, the senior leaders of competing organizations will view all planned and ongoing activities with an eye towards how they might affect the future allocation of roles and missions.¹⁴ This can frequently induce organizational resistance to a reasonable course of action based not on its own merits, but because of the implications any appearance of support might have for future operations. In short, the concern for organizational interests “inclines participants to refuse to report or to concede facts which might be damaging in another context.”¹⁵ This extends to the manipulation of history to cast an organization in a more positive light relative to its peers.

The Politics of Military Bureaucracy

The concept of organizational essence, and the specific behavior it prompts from government bureaucracies, serves as a useful theoretical foundation for this study of the American military services. Modern armed forces exhibit many of the basic characteristics of a bureaucratic organization, particularly under conditions perceived as

threatening by those senior leaders responsible for safeguarding budgets, roles, and missions. The next section will expand on these common organizational values and behaviors and relate them to the various branches of the United States armed forces.

Numerous scholars have applied the concept of organizational essence to the United States military. Perhaps the most authoritative of these is Carl Builder, in his seminal work *The Masks of War*.¹⁶ Although he prefers the term “identity” to essence, the basic concept remains the same. For Builder, identity defines the shared interests and purpose for any successful organization.¹⁷ This section adopts the core tasks described by Builder as representative of the services’ modern organizational essence. The important point is not simply to describe how the services view their essence. Instead, it is to establish a baseline organizational essence for each American military organization. Then, in cases when emerging tasks or future missions infringe on the jurisdiction of multiple services, the incentive for a defensive reaction is more easily understood.

Awareness of service identity allows those both inside and outside of a military service to know what are collectively viewed as core tasks. For the purposes of this work, the organizational essence of the Army is defined simply as the conduct of large-scale high intensity land combat. Although the Army, as each of the services, is frequently tasked to perform missions far different from this core task, that does not reduce the importance of large-scale land warfare in defining the identity of the Army as an organization.¹⁸ For the Air Force, organizational essence is a combination of the desire for autonomy and the flying of combat aircraft designed to independently defeat an enemy from the air.¹⁹ Tasks such as close air support and strategic transport, while

important, are secondary to the mission of defeating an enemy from the air, preferably without the support of ground forces.

If the Air Force sees itself as master of the skies, the Navy views its essence as “control of the seas.”²⁰ The Navy’s essence is built on a tradition of autonomy and independence within the maritime sphere. Although there are intraservice distinctions between the submarine force, the surface fleet, and the air arm, in the end, the Navy as an institution is about control of the seas and not power projection onto the land.²¹ Finally, the Marine Corps, an organization Builder does not describe because of its statutory relationship to the Navy, has an essence based on expeditionary operations. Marines view themselves as the forward presence of the nation, capable of combined arms operations anywhere in the world at a moment’s notice.

At first blush, these four organizational essences seem relatively discrete. The Army, Navy and Air Force divide into the mediums of ground, sea and air, while the Marine Corps ostensibly values only the opening stages of a ground conflict, leaving long term occupation to the Army. However, the potential for overlap is actually considerable. An Air Force that promotes a doctrine of independent victory from the air threatens the essence of an Army predicated on the need to conquer an enemy by land. Similarly, an Army that touts itself as capable of rapid force projection anywhere in the world cannot help but infringe on the organizational essence of the Marine Corps built around expeditionary warfare.

In cases where missions lie at the crossroads of multiple organizational jurisdictions, the professional military organization is most likely to react according to the logic of organizational politics. During periods of uncertainty, when reductions in the

size of the force are contemplated or when budgetary constraints are tightened, these reactions will be even more exaggerated. According to political scientist Jack Snyder, military organizations will display a motivated bias in favor of organizational, rather than professional, outcomes when “three conditions prevail: first, institutional interests are under a severe, immediate threat; second, the interests at stake are fundamental ones, especially . . . organizational essence; finally, there must be some conflict” between organizational interests and objective assessment.²² In other words, the perception of a significant threat to an organization’s essence creates a tension between strictly objective professional conduct and the political needs of the organization.

This recurring scenario has led to a number of well-known studies of military organizations adhering to the patterns predicted by organization theory. Snyder describes the push for offensive military ideology by European armies during the years preceding World War I. Posen explores similar organizational pressures to develop offensive doctrines on the part of militaries across Europe during the interwar years. Perhaps the stubborn determination to find a role for the horse cavalry on the industrial battlefield best describes the effect a threat to organizational essence can have on a military bureaucracy.²³ As Edward Katzenbach recounts in his famous article, the cavalries of many modern military organizations tenaciously resisted the painful lessons of both history and recent experience to justify a role for the horse and rider on battlefields dominated by automatic fire and artillery.²⁴ In each of these examples, the need to protect organizational essence had at least as much influence on military actions and advice as the strictly professional counsel that civilian leaders have traditionally expected from their senior officers.

In nearly every case, bureaucracies seek stability in their political environment and try to secure jurisdiction over tasks they view as their reason for existing. Each of these aforementioned studies deals with actions taken by a military organization to influence how a future war will be fought. The competition over budgets, roles and missions clearly influences the character of advice military leaders provide to their civilian leaders.²⁵ Given that, logic suggests extending the pressure to defend organizational essence into evaluations of the past as well.²⁶

The Practice of Historical Distortion

The preceding sections have attempted to demonstrate that under the right conditions, modern military organizations can and do behave according to the logic of organizational politics. These conditions include conflict over roles and missions related to the organization's essence, perceived infringement by one organization into the core jurisdiction of another, and periods of fluctuating or declining political support. That does not detract from the professional aspects of military service in any way, but simply recognizes that the modern military, like any large government bureaucracy, must be concerned with defending its core tasks in order to survive and retain its value to society.

The application of organizational politics to understand the interaction of civilian elites and military organizations is nothing new. Unlike most studies on the organizational behavior of militaries, however, this one focuses specifically on the practice of leveraging the past to influence the future. The basic hypothesis is that in an effort to enhance and defend its organizational essence, a military organization may present a distorted version of historical events in order to favorably influence strategic decision makers. Historian Michael Howard defined this process as myth-making, the

“creation of a specific image of the past, through careful selection and interpretation, in order to create or sustain certain emotions or beliefs.”²⁷ When it occurs, this distortion of history usually comes at the expense of the sister military services. It is even conceivable that a military organization might present competing versions of the same event over time as it manipulates history to meet shifting political demands.

While this practice is not described in detail in most works of organizational politics, it represents a particularly effective tactic for organizations like the military with exclusive expertise.²⁸ By virtue of its very nature and the dwindling number of civilian elites with military experience, the modern military is positioned to use this tactic to great effect. James Q. Wilson describes the modern military as a craft organization, with processes that are extremely difficult to measure but outcomes that are fairly simple to assess.²⁹ Put more simply, it is relatively straightforward to determine which side wins on the field of battle, but it is extremely difficult for an outsider to determine the precise causes of the observed outcome. Because the military is usually considered the primary repository of warfighting expertise, it often has the exclusive standing to assess the factors leading to victory and defeat. Even outsiders with military experience that attempt to examine combat closely rely largely on access to information available only to the military being evaluated.

As a result, it is possible for the military to serve as the only official version of what happened in combat. This potential can hardly be lost on senior military leaders. In periods when the organizational essence of a military service comes under attack, the ability to favorably depict the combat performance of one service relative to another seems a particularly effective way to influence civilian elites in favorable ways. Nor

would this necessarily even be a conscious choice on the part of the military. In debates over strategy, the military often favors one policy over another “because of motives they would rather not admit, even to themselves.”³⁰ This same truth likely applies to the use of history.

On the whole, it should not be surprising that a service emphasizes its own successes and downplays the contributions of other. What would be more surprising is the military organization that does not make the most of its past in order to safeguard its future. The next few chapters will examine the organizational uses of history by the United States armed forces through the lens of organizational politics, with particular emphasis on the Persian Gulf War of 1991. The theory of organizational politics predicts that during periods marked by shrinking budgets and the specter of manpower reductions, there should be abundant evidence of the military services behaving in ways best understood through the lens of organizational politics. Similarly, in times of expanding budgets and reduced interservice competition, the incentive to selectively interpret history for political advantage should be visibly reduced.

¹Emily Goldman, “The US Military in Uncertain Times: Organizations, Ambiguity, and Strategic Adjustment,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 20 (June 1997): 41.

²Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Glenview: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1971), 93. Allison’s text is frequently regarded as the seminal application of the three models of organizational politics (rational actor, organizational process, and bureaucratic politics) to explain the functions and apparent dysfunctions of government bureaucracies in periods of crisis. See Frank Marutollo, *Organizational Behavior in the Marine Corps* (New York: Praeger, 1990), for an application of Allison’s approach to a modern American military service.

³Russell Weigley, *The American Way of War* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 367-381.

⁴Jack Snyder, *The Ideology of the Offensive* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) for a study of motivated biases by military elites regarding offensive ideology, and Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984) for a similar work that uses an organizational politics approach to explain the development of military doctrine in the interwar years.

⁵Posen, 35.

⁶Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 186-187.

⁷Halperin, 28.

⁸Goldman, 44.

⁹Halperin, 39-40.

¹⁰Goldman, 45.

¹¹Halperin, 91.

¹²Posen, 46.

¹³James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It* (Boston: Basic Books, 1989), 179-195.

¹⁴Halperin, 48-51.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁶Carl Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 36-37.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁹Halperin, 28-29. While the author defines USAF essence in terms of nuclear war against the Soviet Union, I have adapted Air Force essence to separate a view of strategic independence from the nuclear delivery role.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 32-33.

²¹Builder, 31-32.

²²Snyder, 25.

²³Edward Katzenbach, "The Horse Cavalry in the Twentieth Century: A Study in Policy Response," *Public Policy* 7 (1958): 120-49

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Betts, 115-138.

²⁶A good deal of scholarly work has been done on the general practice of historical abuse in pursuit of objectives other than analysis John Gooch, "Clio and Mars: The Use and Abuse of Military History," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 3 (December 1980): 11-20; and Martin Blumenson, "Can Official History be Honest History?" *Military Affairs* 25 (winter 1963): 153-161. However, of these, only Blumenson considers the organizational motives for this practice.

²⁷Michael Howard, "The Use and Abuse of History," *Parameters* 11 (March 1981): 9.

²⁸There are works that highlight the abuse of history in the pursuit of organizational objectives. However, the practice itself is not central to these studies. See, for example, Williamson Murray, "The Past as Prologue," in *America's Defense*, ed. Michael Mandelbaum (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1989), 231-278, and Gian Gentile, "Shaping the Past Battlefield 'For the Future'," *The Journal of Military History* 64 (October 2000): 1085-1112.

²⁹Wilson, 200-201.

³⁰Snyder, 18.

CHAPTER 3

SERVICE STRATEGIES IN THE EARLY COLD WAR YEARS

One way to gain insight into how the armed forces manipulate perceptions of their battlefield accomplishments for organizational gain is to consider how they have acted in the past. As previously stated, organizational politics posits that the *essence* of a bureaucracy remains generally fixed over time. If this proposition is true, then the senior leadership of each of the armed forces will have championed a fairly consistent set of roles and missions that define the services' respective jurisdiction within the realm of military affairs. This organizational essence would have driven decisions concerning which missions to pursue, weapons to procure, and tasks to avoid. It would also impact on the sorts of historical events a service might choose to influence political decisions. For example, if the Army leadership settled on large-scale land warfare as its reason for existing, then one could reasonably expect evidence that the Army as an organization had acted in ways to secure and support this core task.

This should be most apparent during times of political uncertainty, when battles over budgets, roles and missions between the nation's political leaders threaten to undermine an organization's essence. During such periods of upheaval, organizational politics predicts that the bureaucratic character of the military services will subsume the professional side. Senior military leaders engaged in the struggle to influence political decisions are forced to draw on skills not unlike those found in every other government bureaucracy, regardless of jurisdiction. For instance, in the case of force planning, one scholar observed that "despite the complexity of the forces and machines that are the object of planning and the sophisticated information systems that feed the planners . . .

planning is an art form that depends, at least in part, on skill in dealing with the political process.”¹ In relative terms, the art of battle command has little currency in the corridors of power, but the ability to shape perceptions, to build coalitions, and to garner support are requisite skills for the success of any bureaucracy dependent on political decisions for its survival. In these instances, the military behaves no differently than any other large government organization.

The years 1945-1950 represent one such period of uncertainty for the American armed forces. In half a decade marked by sharply reduced defense spending, massive reorganization of the Defense Department, global commitments of occupation and reconstruction, and the advent of the nuclear bomb, none of the armed services could know with confidence that the postwar role it assumed for itself during World War II could be attained.² To the contrary, the essence of each service appeared to be in some degree of danger at various points during the period in question. The Marine Corps faced possible assimilation by the Army. The independence yearned for by the Army Air Corps was in sight but by no means secure. To many, the slow moving flagships of the Navy teetered on the brink of obsolescence in an age of nuclear war. Even the Army, despite its successes during the war, confronted an uncertain future, as nuclear weapons raised serious doubts about the utility of massed troop formations. To make matters worse, President Truman imposed a restrictive cap on defense spending that all but ensured competition over scarce funds. If there was ever a time for the American military services to compete as political organizations, this was it.

This section briefly describes the political environment and organizational reactions of the respective military services during the early Cold War years, with special

emphasis placed on organizational reactions to the prospect of defense reorganization and nuclear weapons. When appropriate, key events are highlighted as support for the broader theme of organizational responses to change. However, rather than analyzing organizational reactions to specific events in detail, the aim here is to identify general trends in organizational strategy during the opening phase of the Cold War. Evidence that the services leveraged history to manipulate elite perceptions of wartime accomplishments, if present, is also identified. The resulting sketches of organizational strategy will serve as initial points of comparison for organizational behaviors after more recent conflicts.

This method of comparison does not ignore the continuous rotation of senior leaders through each of the military services. Nor does it intentionally overlook the fact that the political strategy of the armed forces, like that of all bureaucracies, evolves over time. To do so would be to grossly oversimplify the process. Nonetheless, the behavior of bureaucracies does tend to change incrementally.³ A military service's approach to history during this contentious time will likely foreshadow its methods in later political contests. If nothing else, a service that observes firsthand the success of its competitors in influencing the political process might reasonably be expected to mimic those tactics in later political contests. Close attention to this point will assist in better assessing the effectiveness the manipulation of past events has had during subsequent periods of organizational competition.

Drawing from scholarly analyses of each of the services during this period, I briefly review the political environment that faced military leaders in the late 1940's and early 1950s. When military leaders accurately perceived threats in their political

environment, they had the opportunity to craft a measured organizational response. In some cases, service leaders failed to recognize that a threat to organizational essence existed until the moment for action had passed. In others, senior military leaders exaggerated the threat they faced and reacted more aggressively than they otherwise might. In any case, determining the acuity of the organizations under study in detecting potential political threats contributes to an understanding of which of the services might be more prone to manipulating history to influence political decisions.

Ultimately, this chapter provides only a general sketch of service organizational strategy during a period of political change. I first capture the dominant threats perceived by the senior leadership of each service, highlighting the challenges created by the combined effects of nuclear weapons and defense reorganization. The theory of organizational politics predicts that the greater the perceived threat to an organization's essence, the more aggressive the organizational response. Next, I specifically address when and how history was used by the respective military services to influence political decisions. While a service may adopt a particularly aggressive political strategy, the leverage of past events is not necessarily among the tactics it will employ. In combination, these variables form the point of departure for comparing the organizational uses of history by each service in modern times.

The Air Force: Seizing (and Creating) Opportunities

Of all the services, the Air Force emerged from World War II with the most to gain. After fighting the war as a subordinate element of the Army, independence from the ground forces finally appeared to be within reach. Fortuitously, with the advent of nuclear weapons, the possibility emerged that airpower alone might become the decisive

force on future battlefields. To an organization imbued with a belief in strategic bombing, designation as the nation's primary nuclear arm would not only secure organizational independence for the foreseeable future, but also virtually guaranteed the Air Force would enjoy primacy in both funding and missions. The Air Force seized the moment and took every effort to secure its organizational essence before the window of opportunity closed. Because autonomy was not guaranteed until the passage of the National Security Act of 1947, the threat to the USAF's organizational essence during this period is relatively high. As might be expected, Air Force leaders launched a pro-active organizational strategy to secure their goals. Leveraging favorable history to support organizational claims played a large part.

The Air Force struggle for independence is well documented, and need not be revisited in detail here. However, it is important to note that as a consequence of ongoing efforts to break free from the Army, the Air Force emerged from World War II with an aggressive political strategy and an unrivaled public relations department to carry it out. During defense reorganization battles, this capability served it well. Under the leadership of Secretary of the Air Force Stuart Symington and Air Force Chief of Staff Hoyt Vandenberg, for example, the Air Force consistently "bedeviled Truman and [Secretary of Defense] Forrestal with their successful congressional lobbying."⁴ Reflecting on the bitter infighting and propaganda campaigns waged by the services, Secretary Forrestal recounted a conversation with President Truman in which he promised to advise the services to cease such tactics. However, Forrestal expressed doubts that the Air Force would comply. Truman apparently agreed, noting that "the Air Force had no discipline."⁵ Air advocates also benefited from a number of favorable and timely circumstances. Rapid

demobilization of the ground forces, domestic pressures to reduce commitments overseas, and a general American predilection for technological solutions all lent weight to the Air Force's campaign. Combined with a pro-active organizational strategy, the Air Force tended to have the greatest success shaping political outcomes in ways that achieved organizational goals.

In the battles over defense reorganization, the Air Force backed the Army in supporting the unification of the military departments under a single Secretary of Defense. For President Truman and most members of Congress, unification was expected to lead to a reallocation of roles and missions in ways that would reduce duplication of effort. This in turn would reduce perceived inefficiencies caused by competition among the services. For the Air Force, however, defense reorganization meant control of all national air assets, to include those presently held by the Navy and the Marine Corps.⁶ This would go a long way towards achieving complete victory as an independent institution.

In keeping with its aggressive organizational strategy, the Air Force quickly recognized the potential in presenting wartime accomplishments in the best possible light. Two specific examples of this practice bear out the central role of history in the Air Force's organizational strategy during the early Cold War years. First, many proponents of an independent Air Force viewed the Strategic Bombing Survey, commissioned to analyze the effectiveness of airpower during World War II, as a potential lever to pry control of the Air Corps away from the Army. Second, the Air Force made full use of trusted agents and a selective interpretation of history in its battle with the Navy over both carrier aviation and primacy on the future nuclear battlefield. In both cases, senior

Air Force leaders demonstrated a clear awareness that history properly presented could influence the political process in ways likely to achieve the political objectives of the organization.

Much scholarship has focused on the organizational objectives Air Force leaders hoped to achieve through the Strategic Bombing Survey. As Gian Gentile argued in a recent work, senior Air Force leaders clearly understood the role the Survey would play in determining the shape of both defense reorganization and strategy in the postwar years.⁷ Ostensibly commissioned to objectively analyze airpower's contribution to the allied victory in World War II, the Strategic Bombing Survey "was expected to reveal the tide-turning role of airpower in destroying the enemy's ability to continue the conflict."⁸ Unfortunately, as one official Air Force historian testified, the Survey instead highlighted "the crucial necessity of interdependent operations among the services."⁹ Despite that finding, proponents of an independent role for airpower frequently cited the Survey as evidence of the decisive impact of strategic bombing, urging that it be given the "widest distribution possible."¹⁰ Despite its more balanced findings, airpower advocates seized upon the Strategic Bombing Survey as evidence for their cause in a clear attempt to leverage history for organizational gain.

During this period, the Air Force also pioneered the effective use of trusted agent historical accounts to influence public and elite opinion. Throughout contentious debates over the reorganization of the defense establishment, Air Force leaders had supported the creation of a centralized, joint staff to take the place of the various service secretaries currently in place, a position outwardly at odds with their desire for autonomy. However, Air Force leaders did not base their support on any desire for more effective

administration of the armed forces. Instead, the Air Force “hoped that the new structure would give them substantive control over all national air assets, even including those based on the Navy’s carriers.”¹¹ For obvious reasons, this line of reasoning prompted a great deal of resistance from the Navy.

In support of the interservice battle over defense reorganization, and the control of national air assets it held out to the winner, the Air Force enlisted the talents of William Bradford Huie. A widely read author and fervent supporter of the Air Force, Huie wrote numerous scathing critiques of carrier air questioning its contribution to the war effort and its relevance in future wars.¹² With the purported assistance of highly placed military supporters, his “The Case Against the Admirals” and several follow-up articles were published in Reader’s Digest.¹³ Huie’s writings reached a national audience and represented a clear effort to shape opinions in favor of the Air Force’s organizational goals. Considered alongside the Strategic Bombing Survey, there can be little doubt that as an organization, the Air Force recognized the potential in favorable interpretations of the past, and took serious strides to ensure that historical accounts of airpower depicted the Air Force in a positive light.

The Marine Corps: Quick Learners

Even before World War II, the Commandant of the Marine Corps “was convinced that nothing less than the Corp’s survival was at stake” in the political contest with the Army.¹⁴ While the Marine Corps emerged from World War II with some six divisions and an air component that numbered 100,000 strong, the unification debate threatened its very existence as a fighting force. Army leaders, eager to reabsorb the Marine Corps’ functions as a land force, argued that nuclear weapons made the concept of amphibious

assault obsolete.¹⁵ The very idea of massing troops for an amphibious assault on enemy shores seemed preposterous in light of the destructive powers of the atomic bomb. In addition, tapping into Truman's desire to reduce unnecessary duplication among the services, Generals Eisenhower and Spaatz argued that, armed as it was with tanks, artillery, and air support, the Marine Corps "constituted, by definition, a land Army that duplicated the regular Army and should therefore never again be allowed to exist."¹⁶

As a result, the essence of the Marine Corps as an independent expeditionary force clearly came under attack. If anything, given the subsequent support the Marines received both from the general public and Congress, USMC leaders probably perceived the danger to be greater than it actually was. Nonetheless, believing the organization to be fighting for its very existence, the Marines developed a pro-active organizational strategy to defend their service. Initially disorganized and unfocused, Marine leaders launched a comprehensive lobbying campaign directed at members of Congress and the public at large. It also formed a hasty alliance with the Veterans of Foreign Wars to garner much needed public support.¹⁷ This pro-active approach to political challenges, which played on the "latent but extremely favorable feeling for the Marine Corps among the general public," characterized Marine organizational strategy during this period.

Despite exaggerated perceptions of the threat and a pro-active organizational strategy, the Marine Corps' use of history differed markedly from that of its sister services. Rather than focus narrowly on organizational effectiveness in postwar unification debates with the Army, Marine historians "exploited (a) romantic mystique of toughness and elitism . . . that appealed to supporters in the public and in Congress."¹⁸ In a particularly insightful study of Marine history in this period, Craig Cameron identified

two general patterns in this practice. First, the Marine Corps leveraged accounts of its past exploits to indoctrinate new recruits with the corporate image of an organization composed of elite warriors, despite the fact that reliable statistical evidence refuted this particular view.¹⁹ New recruits received a generous dose of Marine Corps history during their initial training, while emphasis on the organization's storied past dominated official histories. When Marines returned to civilian life, they joined the ranks of civilian 'true believers' in the elitism and necessity of the Marines as an independent fighting force.

Second, the Marine Corps selectively interpreted recent history to create a popular image of the fighting Marine as superior to the regular Army soldier. For example, "given the success of the Inchon landings, it is interesting the present-day Marine Corps history . . . [focuses] less attention on what MacArthur immodestly called a masterpiece of amphibious warfare and instead concentrates on the drama of victory-in-defeat of the First Division at Chosin Reservoir."²⁰ Marines chronicling this event consistently emphasized individual acts of bravery, contrasting the performance of their troops with the lack these same qualities on the part of Army soldiers. By focusing less on operational lessons learned and more on individual bravery, the Marines secured an influential following convinced that absorption into the Army would threaten the very ethos that made the Marine Corps an effective fighting force.

The Marine Corps utilized history as a central component of its organizational strategy, but did so with more subtlety than the Air Force. While airpower advocates seized on questionable interpretations of airpower's contributions in World War II, Marines often wrote their history with an emphasis on subjective qualities like valor, bravery, and sacrifice. As a result, while opponents of airpower squabbled over statistical

evidence, the Marines quietly built a sizable contingent of supporters around a popular image of the Marine Corps as qualitatively superior to the Army.

The Navy: Queensbury Rules in a Street Fight

Like both the Air Force and the Marine Corps, the Navy also perceived a significant level of danger to the health of the organization in the early Cold War years. The pending unification of the armed services under a single Secretary and the possible loss of naval aviation represented genuine threats to an organization hoping to retain “its full World War II force structure (carrier task forces, land-based anti-submarine aviation, the Fleet Marine Force, the submarine force) while adapting it to nuclear weapons.”²¹ The former threatened to seriously undermine the political influence of the Secretary of the Navy, a cabinet position that provided direct access to the President, and subordinate the Navy under a defense department already planning “cuts in naval aviation, the transfer of land-based naval air to the Air Force, [and] no Navy nuclear weapons.”²² The latter would transfer all air assets to a newly independent Air Force in the name of defense rationalization and the avoidance of duplication.²³

Despite recognition by senior naval leaders that a great deal was at stake, however, the Navy adopted a fairly reactive strategy in defense of its position. That is not to argue that Navy leaders failed to engage in interservice competitions over resources or influence. The infamous ‘Revolt of the Admirals’ over the cancellation of the supercarrier *United States* bears testimony to the lengths serving in the Navy were willing to go in defense of their organization. In this particular clash over missions in a new nuclear world, the senior leadership of the Navy had forcefully advocated production of a new aircraft carrier capable of launching planes large enough to deliver atomic bombs.

Success would insure the Navy a role in any future war, and failure seemed to cede control to the Air Force. In keeping with his desire to balance the defense budget, however, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson cancelled the program soon after construction had begun. The Navy leadership responded by publicly challenging Johnson's understanding of military strategy and simultaneously claiming that the Air Force had deceived the public in its quest to secure its own nuclear platform, the B-36 bomber. "The results of this affair . . . were unhappy for the Navy. Several senior officers were forced into retirement and the Chief of Naval Operations . . . was fired by President Truman."²⁴

However, the vast majority of the Navy's organizational maneuverings occurred either behind closed doors or in congressional testimony. In fact, reacting to initial public wrangling over defense reorganization, then-Secretary of the Navy Forrestal restricted all serving Naval and Marine Corps officers from stating any opinions on the matter unless testifying before Congress.²⁵ As a consequence of its generally reactive public relations strategy, "the Navy would be slow to catch up to the Army and the Air Force in presenting its case directly to the public via the media."²⁶

A partial explanation for this may lie in the way these political pressures impacted on the Navy's organizational essence. At some level, Navy leaders seemed to hold the view that "the nation had been a seapower ever since it became a world power at the turn of the century."²⁷ While the loss of carrier aviation or the ascendancy of the nuclear-armed bomber would be traumatic, they did not necessarily endanger the Navy's autonomous control of the seas. Nonetheless, Navy leaders recognized the danger in the rise of the Air Force as the dominant arm in a nuclear future. While this threat raised

questions about the relevancy of the capital ship for fighting major wars and threatened to subordinate the needs of the Navy to those of the sister services, the need for a naval arm was never really in question.²⁸

There is little evidence that the Navy made much use of history, either in defense of its accomplishments or to further its cause with the American people. The one notable attempt to bring historical evidence to the defense of naval aviation was undertaken by Stuart Barber, a former Naval intelligence officer. Dismayed by the apparent lack of effort on the part of the uniformed Navy to defend itself against Air Force attacks, Barber penned several articles offering statistical evidence of the effectiveness of carrier airpower. Barber's writings brought some measure of positive publicity to the Navy. However, in a very telling reaction, "no one in the Navy Department's senior leadership apparently knew, then or later" the identity of the article's author.²⁹ To the Navy, history served no apparent political purpose.

The Army: Hoping for the Best, Accepting the Worst

Of all the services, the Army of the 1940s perceived the least threat to its organizational essence. While the impact of nuclear weapons and reduced funding had dire implications for the short-term health of the organization, "the Army was secure in the absolute necessity of its purpose and continued existence."³⁰ War had always been decided on the ground, and short of nuclear annihilation, there was little reason to believe that this fundamental truth had changed. In addition, unlike the Air Force, the Army had existed since the birth of the republic. The organization had endured the inevitable drawdown process that followed on the heels of every American war. Built around personnel rather than equipment, Army leaders placed less emphasis on force structure

than the Navy or the Air Force. As a consequence, of all the services, the Army was most likely to view President Truman's efforts to rationalize defense spending as a necessary, but passing, evil to be endured.

In the defense reorganization debate, Army leaders drafted plans calling for a "single defense staff headed by a single military officer, supervised by a single civilian Defense Secretary."³¹ Not only would this reduce the influence of the Navy relative to the other services, but it would also further Army desires to absorb the Marines, or at least relegate them to a minor naval policing role.³² That Defense Reorganization would cost the independence of the Air Corps was a price Army leaders were willing to pay. In keeping with the logic of organizational politics, support for airpower drew attention and critical resources away from the Army's essence of large-scale land combat. Spinning this function off into an autonomous new entity freed the Army to focus all its energy on core tasks.

Initial Army reactions to the development of nuclear weapons followed a similar path. Recognizing that the atomic bomb would play a major role in all future wars, the Army attempted to convince both itself and Congress that massed ground forces remained a vital component of national defense. Justification for this position included claims that, even after a nuclear exchange, significant Army forces would be required to occupy defeated lands. Barring a decisive victory, these same forces might be called on to finish off a wounded opponent. Finally, Army units would be needed to secure forward bases from which the Air Force could launch nuclear strikes.³³

While Army leaders passionately pursued their agendas towards defense reorganization, the essence of the Army as the nation's ground combat force was never

truly perceived to be in danger. Predictably, given a lower perception of threat than the other services, the Army adopted a fairly reactive organizational strategy. Though senior Army leaders lobbied Congress and the president in support of defense reorganization, the Army never launched a public relations campaign comparable to its more aggressive sister services. In fact, it was not until the bleak years of the New Look that the Army came to recognize the importance of public relations and popular opinion in influencing political outcomes.³⁴ This same lack of awareness pervaded the Army's treatment of history in this period.

That is not to argue that the Army historical program lacked emphasis. The rolls of Army historians covering World War II far outnumbered those of the other services. Their product was of generally high quality, though not particularly widely read.³⁵ However, Army historians tended to focus on recounting the details of particular battles with an eye towards lessons learned and an emphasis on campaigning. Army history avoided direct comparisons with the other services. In short, although the study of history was important to the Army, the final product was utilitarian, not political.

History and Organizational Strategy, 1945-1950

In characterizing the organizational strategies of the armed forces during this period, two general trends emerge. First, those services that perceived a threat to their organizational essence, accurately or not, tended to adopt more aggressive political strategies than those that did not. Confronting the dual threats of defense reorganization and nuclear weapons, the Air Force and the Marine Corps felt more was at stake than the Army and the Navy and acted accordingly. While some of this can rightly be attributed to

differences in organizational culture, organizational politics undoubtedly contributed to their respective approaches.

Second, those services with more pro-active strategies recognized the potential in using history to create positive perceptions of their organizations. For the Air Force, this meant seizing on favorable interpretations of past events to buttress the case for an independent air arm. For the Marines, the very way official history was presented served organizational objectives by creating a popular perception that Marines were qualitatively superior to Army soldiers. Consequently, absorption by the Army would deny the country its premier fighting force. In both cases, military history served the organizations' political cause.

The next section examines a much different period, the buildup of the military under President Reagan in the 1980s. According to the theory of organizational politics, given conditions of fiscal plenty rather than scarcity, the incentive to leverage history for political advantage should be significantly reduced. However, as the following chapter will demonstrate, organizational approaches to history first developed in the 1940s seemed to endure decades later even as the rationale for these specific behaviors decreased. If anything, during the Reagan years the armed forces seemed to more fully appreciate the persuasive power of history even as the need to persuade diminished.

¹Philip Kronenberg, *Planning U.S. Security* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1981), 168.

²Weigley, 368-381; Vincent Davis, "The Evolution of Central U.S. Defense Management," in *Reorganizing America's Defense*, ed. Robert Art, Vincent Davis and Samuel Huntington (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1985), 149-153.

³Allison, 91.

⁴Allan Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 504.

⁵Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), 149.

⁶*Ibid.*, 502-503.

⁷Gian Gentile, "Shaping the Past Battlefield 'For the Future'," *The Journal of Military History* 64 (October 2000): 1093.

⁸Kohn, 123; See also Williamson Murray, "The U.S. Air Force: The Past as Prologue" in *America's Defense*, ed. Michael Mandelbaum (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1989), 240-246, for an evaluation of the role of airpower and its reliance on the contributions of all services during WWII.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Gentile, 1111.

¹¹Murray, 247.

¹²William Bradford Huie, *The Case Against the Admirals* (New York, E.P. Dutton and Company, 1946), 114-115. Huie railed against Naval efforts to claim that seapower won the Battles of Midway and Coral Sea as propaganda aimed at preventing "the Admirals from being relegated to the command of supporting operations."

¹³Jeffrey Barlow, *Revolt of the Admirals* (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, 1994), 48-49, 198-200.

¹⁴Thomas Boettcher, *First Call: The Making of the Modern U.S. Military, 1945-1953* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 56.

¹⁵Nathan Prefer, "An Uncertain Mission: The Role of the U.S. Marine Corps in National Defense, 1880-1947" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1985), 169-175.

¹⁶Frank Marutollo, *Organizational Behavior in the Marine Corps* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), 74.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 79-85.

¹⁸Betts, 118.

¹⁹Craig Cameron, *American Samurai: Myth, Imagination and the Conduct of Battle in the First Marine Division, 1941-1951* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 165.

²⁰Ibid., 228.

²¹Millett and Maslowski, 502.

²²Ibid., 503.

²³Murray, 247.

²⁴Steven Miller, "Rough Sailing: The U.S. Navy in the Nuclear Age," in *America's Defense*, ed. Michael Mandelbaum (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1989), 202-203.

²⁵Barlow, 58-59.

²⁶Boettcher, 55.

²⁷Ibid., 65.

²⁸Builder, 29.

²⁹Barlow, 62.

³⁰Builder, 30.

³¹Millett and Maslowski, 502.

³²Marutollo, 73-74.

³³Weigley, 369.

³⁴This late-breaking awareness is reflected in the 1956 statement of Secretary of the Army Wilbur Bruckner, "The time has come when no Army officer can sit in the bleachers and act as a mere spectator. Public relations is not a job of the few, but of the many." Quoted in Andrew Bacevich, *The Pentomic Era: The U.S. Army Between Korea and Vietnam* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1986), 22.

³⁵Kohn, 134.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORY AND THE REAGAN BUILDUP

Periods of extreme fiscal and political competition, such as existed during the late 1940s, create clear incentives for military organizations to seek out every possible advantage in their efforts to secure a greater share of federal budgets or political influence. As a result, the fact that the United States armed forces presented their World War II experiences in the most favorable possible light to advance organizational goals is hardly surprising and generally justifiable. However, according to the theory of organizational politics outlined earlier in this study, when these same external pressures are removed, the rationale for misrepresenting history should likewise be reduced. In other words, military organizations will only leverage history for political ends when they perceive it as absolutely necessary. When budgets and influence are expanding, there should be a return to the objective study of wartime events. At the very least, allowing for some constant level of service parochialism regarding history despite changes in the political environment, there should be evidence that the tactic of selectively interpreting history to influence political decisions becomes less common.

The period from 1981 to 1986, generally characterized as the Reagan buildup, presents an exceptional opportunity to validate this assumption. The Reagan administration entered office promising to expand the entire defense budget, creating a situation very different from the budgetary ceilings imposed by President Truman. Under Reagan, the budgetary pie expanded for all the armed services, greatly reducing one area of interservice friction. At the very least, competition in the budgetary arena shifted from a zero-sum game, in which one service's gain was necessarily another's loss, to a

situation in which competition was over relative gains. Concern then became ensuring that no one service received proportionally more of the budget than the others, though all still profited from increased defense spending.

At the same time, the nature of the Cold War and the negative experiences of Vietnam combined to reduce the relevance of recent combat experiences in contemporary political battles. None of the services had any practical experience waging nuclear war (Hiroshima and Nagasaki aside), so none could call upon a relevant historical event to buttress calls for greater influence or a larger share of the budget. The US armed forces had failed to achieve victory in Vietnam, and the mood among both the general public and the organizations themselves reduced the value of Vietnam as a source of positive evidence. When used negatively, as was commonly the case, the lessons of Vietnam gravitated away from specific service contributions to the war and towards cries of excessive political interference in the prosecution of the war and questions about the general policy of containing communism. As a result, there would seem to be little in the way of military history for the armed forces to call on during the Reagan years, just as the incentive to manipulate history for political advantage was simultaneously decreased.

For the most part, the US armed forces behaved as expected during the Reagan years. The selective interpretation of history for organizational gain became far less common in the 1980s, and the examples cited here are exception rather than the norm. However, as this brief overview of the Reagan buildup will demonstrate, the practice of historical manipulation by some of the US armed forces continued even in this time of plenty. Rather than ending the practice in response to a reduced level of inter-service competition, as predicted by the theory of organizational politics, both the Marine Corps

and the Air Force continued to integrate parochial interpretations of past conflicts into their political campaigns of the 1980s, though to a much lesser extent. The Army and the Navy, in keeping with their own past practices, generally neglected history as a source of political influence, although the Army did become more conscious of the potential inherent in historical accounts and made its initial forays into history as an organizational tactic. Coupled with the last chapter, what emerges from a study of the Reagan buildup is a picture of four unique organizational cultures, each with its own level of sensitivity to political incentives, and each willing to go to different lengths to achieve organizational goals.

Defense Spending in the Reagan Years

The election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980 promised to bring a sea change to the American military. Campaigning on a platform of military strength, Reagan promised to rebuild the United States military from what he perceived as a period of neglect under former President Jimmy Carter. Moreover, Reagan did not enter office with any apparent preconceptions about military strategy that might favor any one service. Instead, though seen as strong on defense, Reagan “had no special insight into America’s defense problems.”¹ If Reagan had a military strategy, it seemed as if it could be summed up quite simply as “more is better.” As Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger recalled in his autobiography:

All of our studies indicated that there would be need for a global presence of the Navy, and that would require 15 aircraft carrier task forces, compared with the 455 ships and 12 carrier task forces that we inherited The Air Force had similar needs; and the readiness . . . of both the Army and the Marine Corps would also have to be increased.²

Further enhancing this favorable political climate, most of the American people agreed with Reagan's views on the state of the military. Public opinion polls taken during the period showed that a majority favored an increase in defense spending.³ In fact, the findings of one study indicate that popular support for the military buildup may have added an additional 10 percent to the already hefty increases proposed by the Reagan administration.⁴

From the perspective of the American military, things could hardly have been more promising. Not only did the President favor increased spending on defense, but he advocated a blanket investment in all four services. Support for a strengthened military was widespread among the American people. Thus, the rationale for competition between the services over funding, though never completely alleviated, should have been markedly reduced. In fact, between 1981 and 1985, "Congress appropriated more than \$1.4 trillion (1989 dollars) in budget authority . . . [which] constituted the largest and most rapid increase in defense budget authority in peacetime history."⁵ Overall, the Reagan years witnessed nearly \$2.5 trillion dollars being spent on defense, some \$536 billion over even projected budgets of the time, and six straight years of increasing defense spending.⁶

Despite increases in funding, however, the armed forces still found reason to compete with one another under Reagan, and for all but the Navy, the selective use of history continued as an organizational tactic. For some in the Air Force, Vietnam held lessons that validated the doctrine of strategic bombing and supported claims to a larger share of the expanding defense budget than the other services. The Marines, perennially feeling threatened by the other services, dug even further back into history to revive a

pre-WWII image of elitism and carve out a strategic role in an age of nuclear warfare. Even the Army, though late joining the fray, sponsored a study highlighting the dangers of sacrificing readiness for modernization. Only the Navy, despite receiving the lion's share of the federal budget to fund a 600-ship navy, neglected history in its campaign for funds and influence.

The Air Force and Linebacker II

During the Reagan buildup, the Air Force, like each of the services, advocated investing in a wide range of new combat platforms to better deal with the Soviet threat. This included recommendations to continue production of the F-15 and F-16, along with approval and full-scale production of the F-111 as a dual-purpose strategic bomber.⁷ Air Force leaders also argued for a renewed emphasis on the doctrine of strategic bombing as the central component of any future campaign against the Soviet Union. In making these arguments, some Air Force leaders incorporated historical lessons into their pleas. For example, the lessons of World War II occasionally surfaced as evidence for or against a particular program. However, it was the Linebacker II bombing campaign against the North Vietnamese that emerged as the most common historical reference used by the Air Force to influence decisions regarding both the role of airpower in future wars and the type of aircraft needed to prosecute a future air campaign against the Soviets.

To be fair, the selective use of history by Air Force leaders during the Reagan era was far more muted than it had been in the past. Like its sister services, many in the Air Force wanted nothing more than to push Vietnam into the distant past. To some who favored strategic bombing, "all the premises and assumptions of the previous four decades seemed to evaporate over the skies of Vietnam . . . (and) the primary response

was to turn away from any discussion of strategic theory.”⁸ As a result, most arguments for expanding the Air Force rested on the importance of airpower as one leg of the strategic nuclear triad rather than on lessons garnered from the past. The ability to deliver nuclear weapons to the Soviet Union required a massive long-range bombing fleet, and this was frequently all the justification offered by Air Force leaders in political debates. However, there remained those within the Air Force who augmented their positions with carefully selected or interpreted evidence from past wars.

In a symposium on US military power in the 1980s, for example, Air Force Chief of Staff Lew Allen outlined the roles of airpower in modern war as to: (1) achieve air superiority, (2) provide support to land forces, and (3) conduct strategic bombing.⁹ Though seeming to place greater emphasis on support to ground troops than previous Air Force chiefs, Allen went on to redefine support to ground troops in such a way as to blend tactical and strategic bombing. In arguing for production of the F-15 and F-16, he contended that:

Although we want to know the lessons of World War II and we want to be sure that we neither forget them nor fail to understand them, we must at the same time reapply them, because what was considered to be strategic bombing in World War II is now in fact tactical bombing, flown by small aircraft with small numbers of crews and enormous destructive capability.¹⁰

In short, through creative historical interpretation, Allen combined close air support and strategic bombing into two sides of the same coin. He continued the analogy by arguing for an all-weather strategic bombing capability in order to avoid repeating the failures of the Battle of the Bulge, when many aircraft were grounded by poor weather, as if possessing an all-weather strategic bomber might have provided badly needed close air support to those trapped in the Bulge.¹¹ General Allen was in the minority, however, in

citing World War II as support in the debate over funding and missions under Reagan. Far more prevalent were those in the Air Force who saw in the Linebacker II bombing campaign over North Vietnam evidence that if only airpower had been unconstrained, victory in Vietnam might have been achieved.

Linebacker II was the final evolution of a graduated air campaign that had been waged against the North Vietnamese since the beginning of the war. Rather than interdicting the flow of men and equipment from the North, as in previous air efforts, Linebacker II aimed at breaking “Hanoi’s will” by targeting the capital and strategic logistics assets directly.¹² The way Linebacker II was conducted was reminiscent of bombing campaigns from an earlier period, with long streams of bombers “(lumbering) towards North Vietnam in what was described as ‘an elephant walk.’”¹³ In concept, it conformed quite closely to the classic model of strategic bombing at the heart of Air Force theory. In reality, after nearly two weeks of constant bombing, the North Vietnamese government agreed to return to the bargaining table, and the debate over the significance of Linebacker II began in force.

Though many in the other services saw Linebacker II as contributing to the end of the war but hardly compelling it, there emerged within Air Force circles a consensus interpretation that “Linebacker II, with its great success and its apparent validation of traditional Air Force doctrine” showed what might have been accomplished if only the Air Force had been left to fight the war unfettered by civilian meddling.¹⁴ The problem was not with Air Force doctrine, or that “air power was absent, but that it was squandered and misapplied.”¹⁵ Almost immediately, Air Force leaders offered a string of official statements that interpreted the loss in Vietnam to an air campaign hamstrung from the

start. Air Force historian Earl Tilford documents a series of Air Force publications, speeches, and official statements that promulgated what he terms the “unhealthy myth of Linebacker II.”¹⁶

Ultimately, however, the Air Force’s interpretation of Linebacker II was of little political utility during the Reagan years. The strategic rationale for a long-range bomber fleet proved more than sufficient to justify massive spending increases and the production of several aircraft, to include the original stealth bombers. Nonetheless, the Air Force’s official interpretation of Linebacker II does illuminate several aspects of the service’s approach to history. First, it portrays an organization that continued to perceive the utility in interpreting history in favorable ways, even if only for internal consumption. Second, by interpreting Vietnam as a doctrinal victory in defeat, the Air Force was able to return its focus to an organizational essence defined by autonomy and carried out through strategic bombing, rather than taking a hard (and arguably necessary) look at its doctrine in practice. The widespread acceptance that airpower alone would have proven decisive in Vietnam, if only given the chance, restored organizational faith in the doctrine of strategic bombing and reinforced the rationale for an autonomous role in future wars.

During the Reagan buildup, the Air Force was the most active of the military services in interpreting history in ways favorable to the organization, continuing the trend observed in the last chapter. However, references to history did not play a significant part in the Air Forces’ political battles of the period. Contemporary debates on aircraft procurement and the allocation of missions turned on strategic, rather than historical arguments. There are very few references to history in official statements, and those that exist aim to restore faith within the organization rather than influence those outside it.

Still, Air Force organizational tactics during this period clearly show an enduring appreciation for the power in parochial interpretations of past events.

The Marines Recall Their Glory Days

For the Marine Corps, the primary political threat during the Reagan years was not one of funding, but survival. Beginning in the late 1970s, a small but influential group of academics began questioning the rationale for maintaining a Marine Corps whose functions arguably duplicated those already performed by the other services. In their eyes, the massive conventional threat presented by the Warsaw Pact seemed to diminish the requirement for a force dedicated to conducting amphibious landings. For the Marines, this was a familiar refrain. However, as Reagan entered office, this group of academics had progressed to explicit arguments for absorbing the Marines into the Army and Navy. Whether these cries for defense rationalization actually swayed anyone in the Reagan administration is doubtful. However, the senior leadership of the Marine Corps, ever sensitive to this particular argument, took them seriously enough to mount an organizational response.¹⁷ As in the past, history played a central part in their campaign.

Questions about the strategic relevance of the Marines emerged soon after the conclusion of the Vietnam War.¹⁸ Many analysts doubted the value of maintaining a separate amphibious force, with its own air arm, in light of the massive conventional challenge of the Warsaw Pact. Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Harvey Sapolsky viewed the Marines as wasteful duplication within the defense department and a potential source of savings. “The traditions of the Corps are to be admired, “ he wrote, “but the Corps needs to adjust to the realities of modern warfare.”¹⁹ Brookings Institute Fellows Martin Binkin and Jeffrey Record went one step further. These scholars openly

questioned the relevance of the Marine Corps in a military environment defined on one end by nuclear war and the other by a massive conventional war fought on the plains of Europe. In *Where Does the Marine Corps Go From Here?*, Binkin and Record argued that while the Marines may still have a viable mission, it consisted largely of ceremonial functions and providing security for embassies. In their eyes, clinging to amphibious warfare represented an organization unwilling or unable to adapt to changes in the nature of modern warfare. They contended that “the golden age of amphibious warfare is now the domain of historians, and the Marine Corps no longer needs a unique mission to justify its existence.”²⁰ Unfortunately for the senior leadership of the Marine Corps, the revised mission these scholars had in mind for their service had little to do with combat, amphibious or otherwise.

In responding to this perceived threat, exaggerated though it may have been, the Marine Corps’ senior leaders revived the organizational tactic that had proven so successful in the interservice competitions that followed World War II. They argued that the storied history of the Marines justified their continued existence as the nation’s premier fighting force, ready to deploy at a moment’s notice and qualitatively superior as fighting men in combat. In his study on organizational behavior by the Marine Corps in this period, Frank Marutollo records the efforts of senior Marine leaders to retain a grip on the mission of amphibious warfare while simultaneously touting the Corps as the nation’s premier rapid deployment force. Marine Corps Chief of Staff Lawrence Snowden, for instance, contended that while performing amphibious assaults remained a first priority, the American people and Congress should not lose sight of the Marines as a proven force “trained to the highest degree of combat readiness.”²¹

Past events figured most prominently as evidence of the need for a Marine Corps with the 1984 publication of *First to Fight* by retired Marine Corps Commandant Victor Krulak.²² Writing as a trusted agent of the organization he had recently departed, Krulak directly attacked arguments for absorbing the Marine Corps into the other services through a series of historical examples designed to show the superiority and esprit de corps of the average Marine. In explaining his motive for writing, Krulak offered that the Marine Corps “had neither the instinct nor the time for” handling the pressures of politics and bureaucracy, so he felt compelled to come to their defense and present evidence carefully compiled from decades of combat experience.²³ In the foreword, influential conservative Clare Booth Luce reinforced that Krulak’s work was vital for helping the public better understand why Marines had “come to be recognized worldwide as an elite force of fighting men, renowned for their physical endurance, for their high level of obedience, and for the fierce pride they take, as individuals, in the capacity for self-discipline.”²⁴ That these comparisons came at the expense of the Army, though never stated, seems difficult to overlook.

Once committed to this cause, Krulak mounted a vigorous historical defense of the Corps. *First to Fight* consists almost entirely of vignettes designed to emphasize the positive accomplishments of the Marine Corps and justify its continued existence as a separate service. In fact, at one point Krulak lamented that the sheer amount of historical evidence in support of his cause made it “difficult to decide which of the many great stories to recount.”²⁵ In a sense, *First to Fight* is the very pinnacle of selective historical interpretation in defense of organizational objectives. Reading Krulak’s work, one is left

to wonder if the Marines ever recruited a soldier who failed the test in battle, or encountered a foe that could not be overcome through sheer will and determination.

As in the case of the Air Force, however, one must be careful not to overstate the importance of history in the USMC interservice battles of the period. The threat posed by the small circle of academics and defense reformers did not resonate with political leaders of the time, and it is doubtful that the survival of the Marine Corps was ever truly in danger. However, the fact that the Marines returned to mining history in defense of their organization reinforces two points. First, the Marine Corps clearly remained conscious of the persuasive power of the past, and second, their approach to history remained one of selectively highlighting past accomplishments to draw favorable comparisons with their greatest competitor, the US Army.

Strategies Without History

Unlike the Air Force and the Marines, who continued to look to history in their efforts to influence political decisions, the Army and the Navy did so little with history in their political battles as to hardly merit mention in this chapter. On the one hand, such behavior conforms to the expectations of organization theory. In the case of the Navy, the clear winner in terms of budget shares during the Reagan buildup, the incentive to selectively interpret history in support of organizational positions simply ceased to exist. Even the Army, though a relative loser in terms of defense budget shares under Reagan, continued production on no less than 12 major weapon systems, despite the fact that many had repeatedly failed to meet performance specifications.²⁶ With both organizations relatively secure in their strategic roles and enjoying increased funding flows, the need to aggressively influence decisions may simply have evaporated. However, the failure to

integrate history into organizational tactics also continues a trend observed in these two services in an earlier period, when more aggressive and creative tactics would have served them well. For that reason, Navy and Army organizational approaches towards history during the Reagan Buildup deserve brief examination.

The Navy of the 1980s made up for the absence of history within its organizational repertoire through a reliance on strategic arguments and a very favorable political climate. Contemplating a massive Soviet threat on the sea as well as on land, American naval leaders advanced what they termed the maritime strategy. This strategy called for defeating the Soviet Navy by establishing a forward presence in the world's oceans with no less than 15 carrier task forces, three more than currently existed.²⁷ Working closely with the Reagan administration, which "came to power proclaiming a 'rebirth' of US naval power, and established as the explicit goal of its naval strategy the 'regaining' of maritime superiority," Navy leaders then used the maritime strategy to justify the need for a 600-ship navy.²⁸ This idea became a reality by Reagan's second term in office.²⁹

The man most frequently credited with achieving this massive buildup for the Navy was Secretary John Lehman. By most accounts, Lehman is recognized for not only establishing "a coherent, expansionist ship-building policy, but also (devising) a public relations strategy to promote his objectives" within both the Navy and the larger defense politics community.³⁰ Reading Lehman's own account of his service to the Navy, *Command of the Sea*, however, is illuminating.³¹ Nowhere in this autobiographical work does Lehman cite a historical precedent or rationale for his campaign to build a 600-ship navy. There is the odd historical reference, to be sure, but these are mentioned in passing,

such as the strikingly irrelevant observation that no aircraft carrier had been lost to enemy action since World War II.³² As justification for his naval buildup plans, Lehman relied exclusively on a calculus of strategic requirements based on the previously mentioned maritime strategy. In fact, for a military service so traditional in its outlook, the lack of historical grounding in this period of ascendance is striking.

The same general indifference towards history can be seen in Army actions of the period. A comprehensive examination of Army publications and official statements of the early 1980s reveals almost nothing in the way of historical reference or justification. What references there are to the Army's past accomplishments exist strictly to draw the comparison between the failures of Vietnam and the successes of the contemporary Army.

That is not to say that Vietnam was an under-analyzed war . . . far from it. There is no shortage of scholarly and popular works dedicated to better understanding this war. However, the lessons of Vietnam held only marginal relevance for an organization planning to fight outnumbered in a massive conventional war in Europe. As a result, in the interservice political competitions of the period, the Army relied almost exclusively on strategic arguments. The only significant deviation from this pattern came in 1986, with the publication of *America's First Battles* by the Combat Studies Institute at the Command and General Staff College.³³ However, as in the past, the Army's belated attempts to influence contemporary political debate with evidence drawn from its past arrived too late to make a difference.

In a study of the Army of the 1980s, retired Colonel William Henderson examined the Army's use of history as part of a larger work rebutting what he felt was an

inaccurate portrayal by his former service of problems within the ranks.³⁴ He argued that for the Army, history existed solely for the purpose of drawing negative comparisons, setting the benchmark against which “the marketing or selling of the new *quality* Army to the US public, the Congress, and internally, to the Army itself” could flourish.³⁵ Though references to past wars were fairly common, Henderson found that in the 1980s they almost always appeared in the context of arguments about the superior quality of modern day volunteers compared to those drafted during earlier conflicts.³⁶

That is not to say that the Army lost its interest in history during this period. For example, the development of *Airland Battle*, the doctrine of combined arms warfare designed to defeat the Soviets in battle that replaced *Active Defense*, owed much to a careful historical analysis of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war.³⁷ However, the Army’s approach to history remained utilitarian rather than political. The study of military history existed to prepare future soldiers for combat, to ground officers in the lessons of the past, and to reinforce the lineage and culture of the organization in new recruits. Leveraging Army history for political effect simply did not occur during the Reagan years.

The one exception to this rule came with the 1986 publication of *America’s First Battles*. Though ostensibly written to alert future military leaders to the difficulties inherent in the opening battle of any war, *America’s First Battles* also represented a compelling political argument for military readiness. In the foreword, the editors caution that “it makes a great difference how the Army prepares in peacetime, mobilizes for war, fights its first battle, and subsequently adapts to the exigencies of conflict.”³⁸ They then highlight, through ten different battles, the penalties the US Army had paid in the past, usually as the product of unreadiness driven by the cycle of expansion and contraction

that preceded these conflicts. To make matters worse, the authors contend that in the strategic reality of the 1980s, “the luxuries of time and distance once enjoyed no longer can serve as brakes on the requirements for rapid deployment of forces and their possible use . . . across the spectrum of conflict.”³⁹

The work is exceptionally well written, a collection of contributions from some of the leading military historians of the day. Unfortunately for the Army, by the time of its publication, the glory days of the Reagan buildup had come to an end. Beginning in 1986, “defense authorizations showed no real growth, but declined by an average of 8 percent a year” through the end of Reagan’s second term in office.⁴⁰ In essence, though the Army had finally called upon its own trusted agents to make, through historical analysis, a compelling case for a better balance between readiness and modernization, the die had already been cast.

Trends in the Reagan Years

This brief overview of service approaches to history between 1980 and 1986 both validates the theoretical foundation of this paper and raises interesting questions about the role played by service culture. On the one hand, evidence that the armed forces intentionally leveraged history to advance their organizational interests is in short supply. Unlike the late 1940s, when the experiences of World War II could often be seen justifying both sides of the same argument, references to history in the 1980s are few and far between. Given an expanding defense budget and a pro-military administration, the reasons for interservice competition had diminished significantly, and this finding is not unexpected.

When history was referenced by the armed forces during the Reagan years, however, the approach each service took modeled their prior tactics quite closely. The Air Force continued to find in past conflicts confirmation that strategic bombing, and with it justification for their autonomy, would work if only given the chance. The Marine Corps used the past to polish a carefully crafted patina of elitism, even as it overreacted to a challenge from academic circles. The Navy, though often considered the most traditional of the armed forces, chose to rely solely on strategic arguments rather than history in making its case for expanding the fleet. Finally the Army, despite having ample opportunities to lend the weight of history to its organizational positions, continued to find the past a source of lessons rather than political influence. Despite significant variations in the political background conditions, service approaches to history remained generally constant.

That these behavioral trends continued despite a radical change in the political incentive structure of the period indicates that something more than organizational politics was at work. Since the end of World War II, the military organizations responded to a combination of political incentives and organizational culture. The next chapter addresses organizational approaches to history after a much more recent conflict, the Persian Gulf War of 1991. Focusing on the official and unofficial accounts of this war in yet another period of reduced defense funding and increased interservice competition demonstrates that the selective interpretation of history does fluctuate according to the level of political competition and threat perceived by the armed forces in a given period. However, the general approach to history each service adopts has remained surprisingly constant over the past five decades.

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- ¹Millett and Maslowski, 614.
- ²Casper Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), 57.
- ³Richard Stubbing, "The Defense Program: Buildup or Binge," *Foreign Affairs* 63 (spring 1985): 851.
- ⁴Larry Bartels, "Constituency Opinion and Congressional Policy Making: The Reagan Defense Buildup," *American Political Science Review* 85 (June 1991): 457.
- ⁵James Oliver, "An Early Assessment of the Reagan Defense Policy and Programs," *Perspectives on Political Science* 19 (winter 1990): 53.
- ⁶Millett and Maslowski, 615-616.
- ⁷Kelly Burke, "Future Developments in the US Strategic Forces," in *US Military Power in the 1980s*, ed. Christopher Coker (London: MacMillan Press, 1983), 123.
- ⁸Phillip Meilinger, *Airmen and Air Theory* (Maxwell AFB: Air University Press, 1997), 136.
- ⁹Lew Allen, "U.S. Air Power," in *US Military Power in the 1980s*, ed. Christopher Coker (London: MacMillan Press, 1983), 115-119.
- ¹⁰*Ibid.*, 119.
- ¹¹*Ibid.*
- ¹²Earl Tilford, *Setup: What the Air Force Did in Vietnam and Why* (Maxwell AFB: Air University Press, 1991), 253.
- ¹³*Ibid.*, 256-257.
- ¹⁴Raymond Leonard, "Learning from History: Linebacker II and U.S. Air Force Doctrine," *Journal of Military History* 58 (April 1994): 269.
- ¹⁵A. L. Gropman, "The Air War in Vietnam, 1961-1973," in *War in the Third Dimension*, ed. R. A. Mason (London: Brassey's, 1986), 34.
- ¹⁶Tilford, 288-297.
- ¹⁷Marutollo, 170-171.
- ¹⁸Allan Millett, *The History of the United States Marine Corps*, 2d ed. (New York: Free Press, 1991), 608.

¹⁹Harvey Sapolsky quoted in Frank Marutollo, *Organizational Behavior in the Marine Corps* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), 171.

²⁰Martin Binkin and Jeffrey Record, *Where Does the Marine Corps Go From Here?* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1979), 88.

²¹Lawrence Snowden quoted in Frank Marutollo, *Organizational Behavior in the Marine Corps* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990), 170.

²²Victor Krulak, *First to Fight*, with a foreward by Clare Booth Luce (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1984).

²³*Ibid.*, 225. In light of their political successes over the years, it is ironic that Krulak would argue that the Marines, with their well-earned reputation as the most politically astute of the services, was the least capable of fighting political battles on its own behalf.

²⁴*Ibid.*, ix.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 240.

²⁶Stubbing, 860. The author specifically includes the Patriot air defense system and the Bradley fighting vehicle as systems funded under Reagan despite serious performance deficiencies.

²⁷Robert Love, *History of the U.S. Navy*, vol. 2, 1948-1991 (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1992), 708.

²⁸Miller, 216.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 216-217.

³⁰Love, 707.

³¹John Lehman, *Command of the Sea* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988).

³²*Ibid.*, 342.

³³Charles Heller and William Stofft, ed., *America's First Battles, 1776-1965* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986).

³⁴William Henderson, *The Hollow Army* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990).

³⁵*Ibid.*, xv.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 27.

³⁷Paul Herbert, *Deciding What Has to Be Done: General William E. Dupuy and the 1976 Edition of FM 100-5, Operations*, Leavenworth Paper #16 (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988).

³⁸Heller and Stofft, ix.

³⁹*Ibid.*, xi.

⁴⁰Millett and Maslowski, 622.

CHAPTER 5

ONE WAR, MANY WAR STORIES

While previous chapters examined the organizational manipulation of history across large swaths of time, this section is dedicated to a detailed analysis of service histories after a single conflict, the Persian Gulf War of 1991. Official and trusted agent accounts of this war are particularly relevant to this study for several reasons. First, many of the background conditions that frequently produce interservice political conflict are present at the conclusion of Desert Storm. Despite their laudable performance during the war, political pressures to reduce defense spending and draw down the defense establishment that first surfaced with the fall of the Berlin Wall reemerged with a vengeance in the 1990s. In addition, in a departure from past practices, several official service histories of the Gulf War blatantly accuse the armed forces of intentional historical misuse. Finally, much of the academic and popular literature surrounding the Gulf War finds the military drawing inappropriate lessons from their experiences. Altogether, this combination of factors indicates that the practice of historical manipulation played a central role in the postwar organizational strategies of the United States armed forces, and bears closer examination.

First, each branch of the armed forces stands accused of selectively interpreting its accomplishments in Desert Storm for political gain. Academics charged the services with the intent to “use [their] performance in this war to attack the other (services)” rather than objectively gather lessons useful on future battlefields.¹ Official military histories made similar claims. The Army, for instance, indicted both the Air Force and the Navy for drawing unsubstantiated conclusions from the war in order to influence future budget

decisions.² Even the favorable account given the Air Force in the *Gulf War Air Power Survey* was ostensibly commissioned in order to “ascertain facts and to seek truth, eliminating completely any preconceived theories or dogmas,” implying that some neutral body was required to fairly assess airpower’s contribution to the war.³ In short, though rarely supported by evidence, both participants and outside analysts of the Gulf War alleged that historical manipulation was common after this war.

Additionally, the pressure to draw down the armed forces and reduce defense spending that first surfaced with the end of the Cold War in 1989 again impacted on the military services. After Desert Storm, the armed forces faced proposed reductions of nearly half a million personnel. The nation suffered through an economic recession that exacerbated calls to shift spending from defense to other domestic priorities. With Iraq defeated, even the strategic rationale for maintaining sufficient military forces for two simultaneous major regional contingencies no longer appeared sound.⁴ The combined effect of these political and economic pressures set the stage for intense interservice competition within the Department of Defense. If US forces ever behaved in accordance with the logic of organizational politics, the tumultuous years following the Gulf War promised to be one such period.

Finally, as preceding chapters have indicated, the manipulation of history as an organizational tactic had become increasingly common over the past fifty years. Beginning with conflicting interpretations of strategic bombing after World War II and continuing through attempts to secure a role on the nuclear battlefield, each of the military services gradually developed an appreciation for the importance of favorable historical accounts of their accomplishments, even if their efforts to produce them varied

in effectiveness. As bureaucratic organizations tend to evolve slowly and in rather linear fashion, evidence of continued historical manipulation by the modern military should be expected. In fact, if postwar accusations between the services serve as reliable indicators, the sort of selective historiography uniformly viewed as both unscholarly and unprofessional had become a common organizational tactic on the political battlefield of the 1990s. By the Gulf War, the American armed forces had become increasingly willing to sacrifice historical accuracy on the altar of political advantage.

Establishing a Baseline: The “Official” Version of the Gulf War

Prior to comparing the various service and trusted agent histories of the Gulf War, it is important to briefly establish and justify the baseline used to measure their historical objectivity and tone. That does not require a detailed accounting of what happened during Desert Storm. The general outlines of this conflict are well known. After a phased air campaign that lasted 38 days and a 100-hour ground campaign, a US-led coalition numbering approximately 400,000 achieved a decisive victory over an Iraqi army estimated by some at nearly 600,000 troops. Despite some apparent misgivings offered in hindsight by the military commanders, all of President George H. W. Bush’s stated political objectives were achieved.⁵ Kuwait had been liberated, the international norm of sovereignty reinforced by a military coalition underwritten by the United Nations, and a measure of stability returned to the region.⁶ All this had been won at the cost of less than 400 American lives, although the Iraqis suffered much higher losses.⁷ In short, Desert Storm represented one of the most lopsided victories in modern history. However, recounting what specifically happened is less pertinent to this study than comparing

competing versions of why this war turned out as it did. It is at the level of explanation, not outcome, that one finds history being selectively interpreted by the military services.

Unfortunately, the very one-sidedness of this conflict actually works against an objective assessment of the contributions of the various military services. As one group of researchers has noted, “Iraqi tactics, training, and morale were so poor that Desert Storm hardly provided a convincing test of how Coalition forces would have performed against a more competent adversary.”⁸ One needs look no further than the academic literature surrounding Desert Storm for evidence that conflicting interpretations of the coalition victory abound. In scholarly circles, for example, explanations for coalition success range from the overwhelming dominance of airpower to a fortuitous combination of Western technology and poor Iraqi training, with all conceivable permutations in between represented in one journal or another.⁹

Part of this confusion results from the extraordinary complexity of modern warfare. Outcomes in combat result from the interaction of countless variables, incorporating such disparate forces as technology, training, geography, and random chance. Part is the product of biases on the part of the scholars themselves. Regardless of the source of the problem, the end result is that it is extremely difficult to isolate the contributions of any one service, even at the macro level. The coalition’s success in Desert Storm only amplifies the difficulty. In keeping with the axiom that failure is an orphan while success has many fathers, each of the services was quick to claim a share of the glory in the aftermath of the Gulf War. The result is a confusing tangle of histories with interpretations that seldom agree and all too often directly contradict one another.

Rather than add to the morass with yet another interpretation of the Gulf War in this work, the *Final Report to Congress on the Conduct of the Persian Gulf War* is used as a baseline for comparison in this study.¹⁰ This approach has several advantages. First, the report is a joint product, compiled by the Department of Defense and incorporating input from each of the services at the highest level. It provides a fairly comprehensive view of the war, having dedicated entire sections to the contributions of the air, sea and land components, and allowing each service to inject its version of events into the final product. Furthermore, because it was jointly produced and screened by representatives from each of the services, the editorial review process limited the opportunity for any one service to exaggerate its contributions without incurring the editorial wrath of the others.¹¹

However, the *Final Report* is not without flaws. Composed as it was during a period of intense inter-service political competition, the final product reflected a Department of Defense desire to recognize the contributions of each service while finding fault with none. The result has been described as “more a study in how the Pentagon works to gloss over disagreement rather than to resolve it to any one service's advantage.”¹² Professor Dan Kuehl, primary author of the section devoted to the air campaign, notes that none of the services ultimately opposed the content of the *Final Report* only because it was intentionally written in such a way that ensured “nothing in it . . . was threatening to [any] service programs or resources.”¹³ While serving later on the Gulf War Air Power Study, Kuehl added that many of his peers at the time felt the *Final Report* had concluded that “all Services won the war independently but while cooperating fully with other elements of the Joint force.”¹⁴ Additionally, because General Norman

Schwartzkopf, an Army officer, commanded CENTCOM at the time, some have accused the *Final Report* of manifesting an Army bias despite the best efforts of the other contributors.¹⁵ However, there is scant evidence to validate this concern.

Despite these shortcomings, the *Final Report* offers a relatively balanced and extremely well-documented version of events. If anything, it suffers from the need to recognize each service without making difficult comparative judgments. The result is an account of the Persian Gulf War in which the synergistic contributions of each of the military services led to the final outcome, with none being dominant. Airpower, for instance, “set the stage and helped the Ground Campaign exploit a weakened enemy.”¹⁶ The air campaign is credited with destroying the equipment, formations, and will of much of the Iraqi army.¹⁷ At the same time, airpower’s contributions are qualified by numerous disclaimers, including the favorable desert landscape, an incompetent enemy, and a battle damage assessment process that occasionally overestimated the effects of air attack on the enemy.¹⁸ Airpower, according to the *Final Report*, was to “destroy many important Iraqi units” and deprive others of tactical agility.¹⁹ Nowhere is airpower credited with achieving victory in this war, but its vital role in setting the conditions for a successful ground offensive is pervasive.

Instead, the *Final Report* recognizes land forces for decisively defeating the enemy, enabled by “tremendous support from air and naval forces.”²⁰ The picture painted is one of mutual support, with the success of each service dependent on conditions set by the others. For instance, the report claims that only the dual threats of a land campaign and an amphibious assault held the Iraqis in their defensive positions, setting the necessary conditions for attack from the air. “A protracted air siege alone,” it goes on to

state, “would not have had the impact that the combination of air, maritime, and ground offensives was able to achieve.”²¹ Even in the section on the land campaign, however, airpower is credited with setting the stage for the “dramatic envelopment, destruction of the combat effectiveness of the Republican Guards and defeat in detail of Saddam Hussein’s forces in detail.”²²

The *Final Report* is careful to identify the overwhelming technological, logistical, and training advantages enjoyed by coalition troops as integral to the overwhelming successes of both Army and Marine forces. At the same time, the *Final Report* draws no distinctions between the effectiveness of Army and Marine forces in combat. Both services are cited for their competence, organizational agility and courage.²³ Although identified as a supporting effort, the Marine Expeditionary Forces are credited with seizing Kuwait City and given proportional coverage in sections on the ground campaign. There is no substantive evidence of bias towards Army forces in either content or tone, nor is there any mention in the *Final Report* that the Marines felt slighted by the missions they received as a major part of the ground component.²⁴

Naval forces played an important supporting role in this war, and the maritime component receives substantial coverage in the *Final Report*. United States naval forces are specifically credited with establishing control of the seas in the Gulf region, destroying numerous key targets with sea-launched cruise missiles, contributing significant assets to the air campaign, and performing critical missions ranging from mine-countermine operations to the destruction of the Iraqi navy.²⁵ The critical role of naval forces emerges in discussions of the deployment of forces into theater and in sections detailing the planned amphibious assault by Marine forces off of Kuwait.

As a point of reference for comparing competing accounts of service performance in Desert Storm, the *Final Report* presents an easily summarized version of the war. Victory in the Persian Gulf resulted from the combined efforts of all four components of the American military. All of the services played an important role, with the achievements of each dependent upon the support of the others. Airpower set the conditions for success through a well-executed air campaign, while land forces faced and ultimately defeated a sizable but outmatched Iraqi ground force. Naval forces played a vital supporting role in the war, contributing to the air campaign and enabling a previously unsurpassed deployment effort. No one component alone could or did achieve victory in this war. Finally, the authors of the *Final Report* caution that the success enjoyed, both collectively and by individual services, depended upon a set of uniquely favorable conditions. They are careful to avoid drawing sweeping conclusions from this conflict for future wars.

For all its shortcomings, the *Final Report* remains an appropriate baseline for comparison in this study. It stands rightfully accused of oversimplifying the war, avoiding difficult analysis, and intentionally glossing over interservice comparisons. Like many of the official histories examined throughout this work, this document is as much a political statement as it is an objective account of the war. However, the Department of Defense presented the *Final Report* to Congress to satisfy a legal obligation to provide an accounting of the Gulf War to the elected representatives of the American people. In a sense, this document represents the official version of Desert Storm as agreed upon by the military services. As a joint product written and approved by all branches of the

military, it is all the more useful as a point of departure for examining how the military services portray the war once free from the pressures of committee review.

What follows is the service-by-service comparison of official and trusted agent interpretations of the Gulf War to the version of events formally presented to Congress as the definitive account of the war. Emphasis is on: (1) deducing each service's core explanations for coalition success, and (2) characterizing the tone of each service regarding the contributions of the others. Care is taken to highlight differences between the picture of joint cooperation painted by the *Final Report* and explanations for coalition success presented by the respective services. When they exist, trends in the way official history differs from trusted agent accounts are similarly identified and examined. While detailed analysis of the methods used to arrive at the various conclusions presented by each source is clearly worthy of further study, it is beyond the scope of this work.

Airpower Won the War

Of all the services, Air Force accounts of Desert Storm deviate most from the story of interdependence and cooperation portrayed by the *Final Report*. Rather than emphasize the joint nature of the war, the message of both Air Force official historians and their trusted agent accounts is that airpower *won* the Gulf War. Air Force Fact Sheets, written by the Air Force News Agency, credit the air campaign with defeating the Iraqi forces, rather than simply setting conditions for a ground attack.²⁶ Trusted agent versions go one step further, gleaning larger lessons about the future of warfare and the validation of airpower doctrine from their service-centric interpretation of events. Drawing from the same battles and data as the authors of the *Final Report*, the Air Force interpreted events to argue that airpower had emerged as the dominant military arm in the

Persian Gulf War. This version of Desert Storm then served as justification for Air Force procurement projects and an expanded role in future wars.²⁷

If there is one consistent theme running through official Air Force accounts of the Gulf War, it is that airpower brought the coalition victory. Ground actions, though impressive, represented a mere formality as coalition forces easily crushed Iraqi troops already defeated and demoralized from the air. Consider this account from an Air Force Fact Sheet released in May 1991:

The coalition's intensive airpower had crippled or destroyed Iraq's nuclear, biological and chemical weapons development programs, its air defenses, its offensive air and ballistic missile capability, and its internal state control mechanisms. . . . By Feb. 25, spearheaded by the U.S. Air Force, airpower's rain of explosives had forced thousands upon thousands of Iraqi soldiers to abandon their stockpiles of equipment, weapons and ammunition and surrender--airpower had done its job. Two days later-Feb. 27-the Iraqi military was scattered and defeated-Kuwait was liberated!²⁸

Not only is there no mention of the Navy and Marine aviators participating in these attacks, but the launch of the ground campaign on February 24th is overlooked altogether. A similar version of events is recounted in *Reaching Globally, Reaching Powerfully*, the official Air Force report on the Gulf War, where “in the final analysis, in its swiftness, decisiveness, and scope, the coalition's victory came from the wise and appropriate application of air power.”²⁹ Even when credit is given to ground forces, the enemy is described as shocked, demoralized, and “ridden down by bombing,” further reinforcing the message that the bulk of the work defeating the Iraqis had already been accomplished from the air.³⁰

There is ample evidence that this air-centric interpretation of events was consistent with the views of at least some of the organization's most senior leadership. Following the war's concluding press briefing by General Norman Schwartzkopf,

commander of Central Command, in which Schwarzkopf heaped praise for the coalition victory on the bravery of ground troops, Brigadier General Buster Glosson, the commander of all United States air wings in the Gulf, publicly expressed his outrage. Schwarzkopf's version of events, Glosson felt, failed to give due credit to the Air Force. "Reality, as far as Glosson was concerned, was an Iraqi army that was already defeated by air power."³¹ The official Air Force interpretation of the Gulf War thus stands starkly at odds with the views of the jointly written *Final Report*.

The most frequently cited interpretation of airpower's role in the Gulf War, however, is not the product of official Air Force history. Instead, the message that airpower decided the war reached the widest audience through the *Gulf War Air Power Survey (GWAPS)*.³² Commissioned by the Secretary of the Air Force in 1991 to produce an objective assessment of air warfare in Desert Storm, this document has arguably become the definitive judgment on airpower to emerge from the Gulf War. Sensitive to the perceptions of skeptical readers, the GWAPS was staffed by a collection of active and retired officers from all four services and chaired by Eliot Cohen, Director of the Center for Strategic Studies at Johns Hopkins University and former member of the Policy Planning Staff in the Department of Defense. The GWAPS even hearkened back to an earlier study of airpower, naming Franklin D'Olier, chairman of the Strategic Bombing Survey after World War II, its self-appointed conscience and standard-bearer of objectivity.³³ Each of these steps would ostensibly lead to general public acceptance of the study's findings as the unbiased judgments of a group of carefully selected, impressively credentialed and informed analysts.

However, the interpretation of events produced by the GWAPS, despite its theoretically balanced and objective staff, differs markedly from the picture of interservice cooperation presented in the *Final Report*. In general, the GWAPS presents an extremely positive account of airpower's effectiveness in the war, with minor caveats in the areas of targeting, battle damage assessment, and effects against specific enemy target sets. Still, according to Cohen and his team of analysts, the Iraqi Army had been "found, fixed, fought and finished" from the air.³⁴ While this statement captures the boldest refutation of the joint version of events (in which airpower played a supporting role in the coalition's success) the GWAPS hardly limited airpower's successes to defeating the ground forces of Saddam Hussein. In studying airpower's impact across the entire spectrum of the war, even partial failures were few and far between.

After carefully drawing a line between the direct, quantifiable impacts of airpower and its more subjective, but no less important, indirect effects, the authors of the GWAPS determined that even in cases where airpower failed to achieve its stated pre-war objectives, the indirect effects of the air campaign wreaked considerable damage on the Iraqis. Strategic attacks, despite failing to decapitate the Hussein regime or cripple its ability to launch SCUDS, "must have imposed some, if not considerable, disruption and dislocation on the Iraqis involved."³⁵ Though air interdiction failed to prevent the Iraqis from moving supplies within the theater, it probably would have been decisive if only given a few more weeks to take effect.³⁶ Even with these shortfalls, the GWAPS attributes the decisiveness of the ground component to the effectiveness of the air campaign. "The most important contribution of airpower . . . and a prime reason why the

ground campaign was so short and so overwhelming, was the success of air interdiction in preventing the (Iraqi) heavy divisions from moving or fighting effectively.”³⁷

Nonetheless, the GWAPS stops short of declaring total victory from the air. It acknowledges the contribution of ground forces, even if simultaneously denigrating the fighting resolve of the Iraqi opponent. More importantly, Cohen and his team shy away from concluding that the Gulf War validated airpower’s ascent to dominance on the modern battlefield. They are careful to note the confluence of factors favoring the use of airpower over Kuwait, and call for “a sterner test against a more capable adversary to come to a conclusive judgment” about the role of airpower in future conflicts.³⁸

Upon reviewing these findings, Richard Hallion, Chief of the Office of Air Force History, recommended that publication of the GWAPS be withheld, a position seconded by General Glosson, then Deputy Chief of Staff of the Air Force for Plans and Operations.³⁹ In a clear indication of political sensitivity, Hallion and Glosson deemed even the minor criticisms of airpower’s effects against mobile SCUDS, Iraqi command and control, and Hussein’s WMD program damaging to a version of the war that gave sole pride of place to the Air Force.⁴⁰ That the Air Force’s own chief historian could take such a position speaks volumes about the organizational uses of history at the center of this study. By way of comparison, in his own work on Desert Storm, Hallion directly credits airpower with the coalition victory. “Simply (if boldly) stated,” he writes, “air power won the Gulf War.”⁴¹ Although Hallion’s work relies almost entirely on anecdotal evidence, he does not hesitate to conclude that airpower’s dominance over the Iraqi’s clearly marks the ascendance of airpower over the other military components.⁴²

Along with the GWAPS, Hallion and others carried forward a trusted agent view of the Gulf War significantly different from the *Final Report*. It was a version of events that switched the roles of the major players from the script submitted to Congress, with the Air Force now playing the leading part and the other services contributing only as extras. While official Air Force history adopted a similar stance regarding the dominance of airpower, some of the more aggressive trusted agents went one step further, asserting that airpower had finally been vindicated as “an invincible tool of U.S. policy that could go anywhere to hit any target and against which there could be no defense.”⁴³

Vanquishing the Past, Battling for the Future

In *The Whirlwind War*, historians Frank Schubert and Theresa Kraus adopt an interesting position regarding the Gulf War on behalf of the Army.⁴⁴ On the one hand, *Whirlwind War* presents a detailed operational account of Desert Storm, recounting troop movements and significant battles with only the occasional foray into tactical assessment. Although the work has an understandable emphasis on the Army, the authors credit the combined efforts of all four military services with the victory, mirroring the joint position taken in the *Final Report*. In their conclusion, however, Schubert and Kraus lament the organizational maneuverings of the other services. They complain about the selective interpretation of events and historical distortions presented by both the Navy and the Air Force to support favored projects, about the use of the war as a “tool in interservice budgetary competition,” but make no effort to overtly refute these claims in the main body of their report. Instead, when it does veer into interpretation, *Whirlwind War* focuses internally, trumpeting the victorious rebirth of the Army after the painful trials of

Vietnam. Even then, analysis of the Army's performance is carefully balanced, with an equal measure of criticism and praise.

If one thing stands out about the Army's official account of events in the Gulf War, it is the complete absence of interservice comparison. Nowhere does the work criticize or make judgments about the relative weight of each service's contributions. Instead, Army historians assume the same joint perspective on the Gulf War found in the *Final Report*. They attribute victory in Desert Storm to the "combination of a powerful air offensive, followed by a fast moving armor-reinforced ground campaign."⁴⁵ Naval forces are praised for supporting amphibious operations off the coast of Kuwait; Air Force and Navy pilots with devastating attacks on Iraqi ground formations. The Marine Corps earns equal billing with the Army in chapters on the actual conduct of the ground campaign.⁴⁶

Notably, Army historians are quick to credit airpower with demoralizing enemy troops and setting the stage for the success of the ground campaign. The Army's official association seconded these remarks, explaining that while the "air war deprived Saddam of the ability to see, a remarkable maneuver was taking place to position ground forces for the planned attack that would eventually result in the liberation of Kuwait."⁴⁷ However, after attributing victory to the combined efforts of the air and ground campaigns, Army accounts part ways with the airpower advocates, failing to present the Iraqis as the defeated, hollow force that inhabits the pages of Air Force histories. Instead, Iraqi defensive fighting is described as "hard" and "tough." Republican Guard units, less impacted by the air campaign, are singled out for their stubborn determination and large

numbers of undamaged tanks.⁴⁸ In effect, the authors implicitly deny arguments that airpower had all but defeated the Iraqi Army prior to the launch of ground attacks.

The one overt organizational message that pervades *Whirlwind War* is the tale of an Army finally shedding the burden of its troubled years in Vietnam. The authors spend an entire chapter tracing the evolution of the Army between 1970 and 1990. That the organization felt the need to convince readers that “the Army that deployed in 1990 to Saudi Arabia . . . bore little resemblance to the Army that left the Republic of Vietnam in 1972” itself is important.⁴⁹ On the one hand, it indicates that the Army perceived the opportunity to use its contemporary successes to counter what was still viewed as past failures. In effect, the organization used recent history to overcome past history.

At the same time, however, the Army’s decision to employ history for intra-service, rather than inter-service, purposes reinforces a trend in organizational behavior observed in each of the periods examined in this study. The Army has traditionally opted not to wield official history aggressively against the other services in the pursuit of its political objectives. Desert Storm was no exception. Making a clean break with Vietnam addressed a long-standing need in both the organizational and public psyche, but it did not markedly further the Army’s cause in the pursuit of future missions, roles or budget.

The Army’s trusted agents, however, clearly recognized the political importance of history, even if they ceded the initiative to the Air Force after Desert Storm. In the aftermath of the air-centric presentation of facts in the Gulf War Airpower Study, the Army commissioned its own study to “uncover what soldiers call the ground truth.”⁵⁰ *Certain Victory* emerged as the Army’s primary trusted agent account of Desert Storm.⁵¹ Unlike the GWAPS, the Desert Storm Study Project team that researched the book was

made up entirely of active Army officers. Though serving members of the organization, they are properly characterized as trusted agents rather than official historians because they worked independently from the Center of Military History, having been selected for their operational experience rather than their academic credentials.⁵²

Without overtly declaring its opposition to the GWAPS, claims in the preface that “no single service or nation won the Gulf War on its own” left little doubt about the target of the Army’s interpretation of events.⁵³ Brigadier General Robert Scales and his team intended to reinforce public awareness of the necessity for cooperation between all the services in warfare, both present and future, while refuting claims that any one service alone deserved credit for victory in the Gulf War.⁵⁴ Nowhere was their objective clearer than in the summation of lessons learned, in which the authors wrote:

The Coalition bombing of the Iraqi army, prosecuted with great tenacity and professionalism, was terribly destructive. . . . Yet the air operation, even though it lasted 41 days, failed to break the will of the Republican Guard, to stop it from responding to the Great Wheel, or to prevent it from retiring some of its elements to safety. . . . Fighting units fail when their will is broken, not when some of their equipment is destroyed . . . (and) good units can only be broken in direct combat.⁵⁵

In making its case, *Certain Victory* adopted an approach normally reserved to Marine accounts of combat. Each of its seven chapters opened with a brief vignette of battle from the individual soldier’s perspective rather than the more detached operational narrative normally seen in Army histories, effectively personalizing ground combat for the reader. Like the *Whirlwind War*, however, a significant number of pages were reserved for telling the story of an Army finally vindicated after years of reshaping and reforming after Vietnam. The recurrence of this particular theme in every major Army account of Desert Storm underscores both the pain that Vietnam still held for Army

leaders and the recognition that defeating this ghost of the past needed to be captured in the history of the present war to cement victory the minds of the organization and the American public.

Like official Army historians, Scales' team was careful to note the danger in drawing lessons from the lopsided defeat of Hussein's troops.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, the authors conveyed organizational messages of their own. They contended that Desert Storm reinforced the requirement for ground forces to bring *any* conflict to a decisive end. Harkening back to earlier trusted agent accounts of Army history, they also argued that maintaining a deployable, highly trained and well-equipped force capable of winning the first battles of a conflict was the "single most enduring imperative of the Gulf War."⁵⁷ Finally, as representatives of an Army dependent upon the combined efforts all military services, they reinforced the message of the *Final Report*. Future wars would require "all aerial and ground platforms, regardless of the Service of origin, be blended together into an effective, seamless striking force."⁵⁸

Just the Facts

Of all the services, the Marine Corps' history of the Gulf War is most surprising for its neutral tone and general objectivity. For a military organization infamous for its political skill and supposed thirst for recognition, official Marine Corps' accounts of Desert Storm are remarkably unbiased. In a series of monographs dedicated to the major USMC units that served in the Gulf War, reserve Marine historians present little more than a detailed tactical narrative, broken only by the occasional accounts of personal bravery by individual Marines.⁵⁹ Only in trusted agent accounts of the Marines are any

swipes taken at the other services, and these are less caustic and more varied than those between the Army and the Air Force.

As a result, Marine histories of the Gulf War are relatively simply to summarize. Each begins by emphasizing the strategic mobility of the Marine Corps, acknowledging difficulties presented by the rapid call-up of forces but celebrating how all obstacles were overcome by the diligence and creativity of hardworking Marines on the ground.⁶⁰ The authors then launch a largely tactical narrative of events, interspersed with references to individual Marines who contributed along the way.⁶¹ Marine Corps historians make few, if any, references to the other services. What mention is made is only in passing, and usually just to establish the historical backdrop needed to place their own organization's actions into the proper context.

There is an emphasis on ground combat that emerges from these accounts, and if the reader were not familiar with the amphibious deception mission conducted by the Marines off the coast of Kuwait City, its importance in the grand scheme of events could easily be overlooked. Instead, much time and ink are devoted to covering the Battle of Khafji, in which Marines decisively defeated a much larger enemy armored attack in one of the few Iraqi offensives of the war, a decisive victory but one of arguably less strategic importance than the amphibious feint that froze large numbers of Iraqi units in place at the start of the war. Coupled with the emphasis on individual accomplishments, such selective historical emphasis continued the Marine trend of portraying the organization as an elite fighting force. However, polishing the aura of elitism did not come at the expense of the other services, as it had after previous wars.

Marine trusted agent accounts of the Gulf War did not restrict themselves to making operational assessments. Unlike the Army and Air Force efforts, however, Marine Corps advocates did not unite behind a common message.⁶² Retired Marine General Bernard Trainor complained that the Army had intentionally slighted the Marines with lesser missions in order to keep all the postwar glory to itself.⁶³ John Quinn and Jack Schumlinson accused the Air Force of misallocating Marine air sorties during the war, reinforcing the need to keep the Marine air-ground team distinct from the other services.⁶⁴ Still others believed that the Marines failed to receive their due for what they had actually achieved. J. Robert Moskin went so far as to argue that “the Marines’ assault . . . became the heart of the ground war.”⁶⁵ Ultimately, there is no evidence of organizational direction behind these efforts. Instead, they appear to be the spontaneous views of former Marines still emotionally attached to the organization and intent to see that it received its due.

For all its reputation, at least in the realm of history, the Marine Corps emerged as the most self-confident of the military organizations. Their skillful use of history in the past makes it impossible to claim that the Marine Corps does not recognize the potential in casting history in a favorable light. Perhaps they did not feel threatened by the battle for strategic dominance waged between the Army and the Air Force, secure in the knowledge that their missions and funding were not at risk. At any rate, aside from fueling existing perceptions of the Marine Corps as the nation’s elite fighting force, USMC use of history after the Gulf War was surprisingly evenhanded.

Too Little, Too Late

What is noticeable about Naval accounts of the Persian Gulf War is less what is said, than how long it took the Navy to say it. The Navy's participation in the Persian Gulf War, while significant, never received media coverage on the scale of any of the other services.⁶⁶ Aside from contributing sorties to the air campaign and firing from the littorals in support of ground troops, much of what the Navy did fell into the category of supporting operations. The relative absence of a naval threat, along with the vital but rather uninspiring aspects of strategic sealift, left the Navy at risk of becoming the forgotten partner in the grand American victory. At the same time, the Navy confronted the same budget-constrained political environment as the rest of the armed forces in the early 1990s. This combination of factors would seem to create incentives for the Navy to publicize its accomplishments, hoping to capture a share of the credit and political capital being showered upon the other services in the immediate aftermath of the war. Instead, the Navy issued a single statement from the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations concerning the fleet's role in Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

This brief 65-page pamphlet highlighted two of the Navy's key qualities: strategic deployability and control of the seas.⁶⁷ Where the Air Force saw the first war won from the air, and the Army a combined-arms affair that validated long years of rebuilding after Vietnam, the Navy predictably saw "the most complex, fast-moving, successful, major joint power projection operation in history."⁶⁸ Coalition success hinged on the Navy's ability to project US forces into the theater, while simultaneously deterring potential adversaries from interfering with the vital flow of troops and equipment. The statement also highlighted the Navy's contribution to the air campaign, a fact frequently (and

conveniently) overlooked by many advocates of the Air Force, along with the success of its sea-launched tomahawk cruise missile in destroying heavily defended targets throughout Iraq.⁶⁹

However, the Navy's official account of its participation does not explicitly criticize the other services for slighting naval contributions to the war. Despite minor complaints about the misuse of Naval air assets by the Joint Force Air Component Commander during the War, for example, the statement called only for additional staff representation and refinement of joint procedures for the control of air assets in future conflicts.⁷⁰ Nor did the Navy find any grand lessons from victory in the Gulf War. To the contrary, it cautioned that Desert Storm not be considered "a model for future operations."⁷¹ Instead, the Navy's official statement on Desert Storm closed with mild reminders about the absolute necessity of both sea control and power projection in any future war, with all that implied about force structure decisions for the fleet.

In general, *The U.S. Navy in Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm* closely approximated the content and tone of official statements by the Army. It attributed success to the combined efforts of all services, hesitated to view victory over Iraq as a valid test of strategic concepts or systems, and generally avoided criticism of the other services. The more surprising aspect of the Navy's organizational approach to history after this war is that *nothing* followed the Chief of Naval Operation's statement for eight years. There was no trusted-agent account to emerge in response to the GWAPS, nor did any former Admiral rush to the presses in defense of the fleet. In fact, aside from a number of autobiographical accounts of naval aviators in combat, only two major works have since emerged to tell the Navy's version of this war.

In 1999, the Naval Historical Center attempted to set the public record straight on naval contributions to the war lost in discussions of the “air blitz against Iraq” and the “Hail Mary maneuver around the desert flank of the Iraqi army” with the publication of *Shield and Sword*.⁷² This comprehensive volume addressed all aspects of the maritime campaign in nearly 400 pages of painstakingly researched analysis. It pulled no punches, especially in criticism of the Air Force over inflexible targeting procedures and interservice frictions that reduced the effective employment of naval air assets.⁷³ The Center for Naval Analyses published a second trusted agent account the following year with *Desert Storm at Sea: What the Navy Really Did*.⁷⁴ This trusted agent account also focused on the operational and tactical operations of the Navy during the war. Criticism of the Air Force’s use of naval air assets reemerged as a major topic. However, this second study adopted a very technical tone throughout, reducing its appeal to the non-military public and arguably its value as a historical defense of the organization.

On the whole, the Navy’s two trusted agent accounts of Desert Storm represent the most objective, in-depth analysis of any service’s contributions to the war. Neither of these books attempts to validate larger doctrinal or strategic lessons for the Navy. Instead, the authors seem content to raise public awareness of the Navy as a major contributor to the coalition effort, assess areas of naval strength and weakness, and raise doubts about the Air Force’s wildly positive interpretation of the war. However, there is some question as to how effective these efforts have been, especially as Desert Storm had faded from the public mind by the time of their publication, replaced by subsequent air campaigns over Bosnia and Kosovo. Once again, the organizational use of history by the Navy after

Desert Storm seems almost half-hearted, as if leveraging past accomplishments in the pursuit of political goals is either unseemly or unwarranted.

Summary of Findings

When the various service and trusted agent accounts of the Persian Gulf War are considered collectively, a mixed picture emerges. The Department of Defense's *Final Report to Congress* showers praise upon each of the services, careful to acknowledge their respective contributions and highlighting the interdependent nature of the coalition victory. In the 'official' version of events, victory over the Iraqi forces resulted from a devastating air campaign, followed by an overwhelming land campaign waged jointly by the Army and the Marine Corps, all of which was ably supported by naval air and surface assets.

At the level of the individual military services, however, official and trusted agent history tells a different story. Advocates for and within the Air Force seized upon Desert Storm as evidence that airpower had finally shown it could defeat a land force without assistance from the other services. Army supporters, recognizing the danger in this line of reasoning, countered with their own interpretation of the war. They raised questions about the conclusions drawn by the Air Force, particularly those concerning effectiveness against the Iraqi ground forces. At the same time, the Army, as a service traditionally dependent upon others for both strategic mobility and air support, reinforced the message that warfare was a joint affair, both in Desert Storm and for the foreseeable future.

While these two organizations battled for the historical high ground, the Navy and the Marine Corps adopted less aggressive stances. That said, neither passively accepted the findings of the *Final Report*. In the case of the Marine Corps, history once again

adopted a personal tone, highlighting individual accounts of bravery and sacrifice alongside an objective operational assessment of the war. The Marines would be remembered for their combat on the ground, not the amphibious assault that never happened. The Navy, though evidently aware of being lost in the background noise of the Army-Air Force clash, waited almost eight years to regain some share of the credit for victory. Once it did, though, it presented yet another version of this war, in which success depended on power projection capabilities and forward presence. It also lent its voice to the Army's claim that victory over Iraq did not presage the emergence of airpower as the dominant military arm.

Ultimately, each service presented a history of Desert Storm at odds with both the baseline in the *Final Report* and the accounts of the others. These various and conflicting interpretations of events all served organizational needs to some extent, whether justifying procurement programs, advocating the adoption of new strategic visions of war, or simply ensuring that history remembered the organization for the 'right' reasons. What remains is an assessment of what drives this practice, and a determination of whether it holds any lessons for the civilian and military leaders of the nation.

¹Bruce Watson and others, *Military Lessons of the Gulf War* (London: Greenhill Books, 1991).

²Frank Schubert and Theresa Kraus, ed., *The Whirlwind War* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1995), 235. The authors explicitly argue "the war became a tool in interservice budgetary competition. . . . The Air Force, asserting that its success in the war validated strategic bombing and proved the primacy of its own role, sought more and newer aircraft. The Navy, too, claiming it was the most readily deployable force when hostilities began, urged Congress to fund more ships."

³Thomas Keaney and Eliot Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey Summary Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993), x.

⁴Les Aspin, "An Approach to Sizing American Conventional Forces for a Post-Soviet Era," in *Strategy and Force Planning*, ed. Richmond Lloyd (Newport: Naval War College Press, 2000), 448-468.

⁵Bob Woodward, *The Commanders* (New York: Pocket Books, 1991), 365-366. See also Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Gulf War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993) for a general account of the conflict.

⁶George Bush, *National Security Directive 45, U.S. Policy in Response to the Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait*, 20 August 1990.

⁷Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, *Persian Gulf War Casualty Summary*, Washington Headquarters Services (1 July 2003).

⁸Alberto Bin, Richard Hill, and Archer Jones, *Desert Storm: A Forgotten War* (Westport: Praeger, 1998), 237.

⁹For a representative sample of academic attempts to analyze coalition success in Desert Storm, see Darryl Press, "The Myth of Airpower in the Persian Gulf War and the Future of Warfare," *International Security* 26 (fall 2001): 5-41; Thomas Keaney, "Gulf War Airpower," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 2 (autumn 1993): 25-36; Thomas Mahnken and Barry Watts, "What the Gulf War Can (and Cannot) Tell Us about the Future of Warfare," *International Security* 22 (fall 1997): 151-162; and Stephen Biddle, "Victory Misunderstood: What the Gulf War Tells Us About the Future of Conflict," *International Security* 21 (fall 1996): 139-179.

¹⁰Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Final Report to Congress on the Conduct of the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992.).

¹¹Daniel Kuehl, correspondence with the author, 13 March 2004, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Kuehl served as primary author of the section on the air campaign for the *Final Report to Congress on the Conduct of the Gulf War*.

¹²"Read All About It: Reading List for Desert Storm II," accessed at WashingtonPost.com on 7 March 2004.

¹³Daniel Kuehl, correspondence with the author, 13 March 2004, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵While I can find no written evidence of this claim being made, a careful reading of the *Final Report* does indicate what might be interpreted as a positive bias towards the land forces. For example, the section on land power begins with a familiar quote from T. R. Fehrenbach's *This Kind of War*, reminding readers that "You may fly over a land forever; you may bomb it, atomize it, pulverize it and wipe it clean of life- but if you desire to defend it, protect it, and keep it for civilization, you must do this on the ground,

the way the Roman legions did, by putting your young men in the mud.” This remark is starkly at odds with predominant view of many at the time that airpower won the war. See T. R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War* (Washington: Brasseys, 1998).

¹⁶*Final Report to Congress on the Conduct of the Persian Gulf War*, 149.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 114.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, xxii.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 298.

²¹*Ibid.*, xxi.

²²*Ibid.*, 295.

²³*Ibid.*, 295-296.

²⁴This is limited to written expressions of discontent by the USMC in the *Final Report*. There have been several high-ranking active and retired Marines who have expressed a belief that the Army intentionally slighted the Marines during the assignment of combat missions during the war in order to preserve all the public acclaim and glory for the Army.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 183-187.

²⁶The Air Force News Agency serves under the Air Force Office of Public Affairs, yet interestingly no mention is made of this fact. Despite being an arm of the USAF public relations office, Fact Sheets are presented as historical documents with no mention of author or sponsoring agency.

²⁷Air Force News Agency, *Reaching Globally, Reaching Powerfully: The U.S. Air Force in the Gulf War*, Special Report (September 1991). This document concludes that not only has the Gulf War demonstrated the importance of air superiority, but makes the case why buying the F-22 is “is not merely desirable, but mandatory, if America is to retain its air superiority edge in the potential combat environments of the future.”

²⁸Air Force News Agency, *Airpower in Operation Desert Storm*, USAF FACT SHEET 91-03, Special Edition (May 1991).

²⁹*Reaching Globally, Reaching Powerfully* (September 1991).

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹*Interview with Bernard Trainer*, PBS Frontline: The Gulf War, Available at: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/trainor/6.html>, Accessed 9 December 2003.

³²Thomas Keaney and Eliot Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey: Summary Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993).

³³*Ibid.*, ix-x.

³⁴Eliot Cohen, *Gulf War Air Power Survey: Effects and Effectiveness* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1992), 104.

³⁵Keaney and Cohen, 70. Statements like these are not supported by hard evidence. Instead, the authors project what they believe are the indirect effects of bombing onto the Iraqi regime, and then present the hypothetical outcome as a measure of the success of the air campaign.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 98-99.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 116.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 246.

³⁹Daniel Kuehl, correspondence with the author, 15 March 2004, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Kuehl indicates that Glosson went to Secretary of the Air Force Sheila Widnall recommending the GWAPS be classified once he read the minor criticisms it included concerning airpower's effectiveness during the Desert Storm against a few specific target sets, such as SCUDS.

⁴⁰Gordon and Trainer, 465.

⁴¹Richard Hallion, *Storm Over Iraq* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 1.

⁴²Regarding the actual data used by CENTAF to assess its own effectiveness during the war, Hallion asserts that Air Force estimates *were* in error, but only by being too conservative and not giving full credit to the impact of the air campaign. His own figures attribute 60% losses in Iraqi tanks and artillery, along with 40% in armored vehicles, to interdiction efforts. How he arrived at these estimates, however, is not fully explained.

⁴³Caroline Ziemke, "A New Covenant?: The Apostles of Douhet and the Persian Gulf War," in *The Eagle in the Desert*, ed. William Head and Earl Tilford (Westport: Praeger, 1996), 292.

⁴⁴Frank Schubert and Theresa Kraus, ed., *The Whirlwind War* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Officer, 1995).

⁴⁵Ibid., 205.

⁴⁶Ibid., 173-205.

⁴⁷AUSA Institute of Land Warfare, *The U.S. Army in Operation Desert Storm* (Arlington: Association of the United States Army, 1992), 14.

⁴⁸Schubert and Kraus, 179-188.

⁴⁹Ibid., 25.

⁵⁰Robert Scales, *Certain Victory: The US Army in the Gulf War* (Fort Leavenworth: US Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1994), vii.

⁵¹The other major Army reviews of Desert Storm tend towards autobiographical accounts with extensive operational detail. The most famous celebrate, like the works cited here, the Army's rebirth after the difficult years in Vietnam, instead of making the Army's case against the air-centric interpretations of the war. See Tom Clancy and Fred Franks, *Into the Storm: A Study in Command* (New York: G. P. Putnam Sons, 1997); H. Norman Schwartzkopf, *It Doesn't Take a Hero* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992).

⁵²The reader may certainly criticize this classification. However, while I acknowledge that serving officers present an organizationally sanctioned interpretation of the war, they are not writing under the rubric of official history, nor are they any less a trusted agent than when former officers or serving military historians publish books about the war under their own name, rather than the organization they are advocating. I have strictly limited official history to publications by the various service history centers to preserve this important distinction.

⁵³Scales, vii.

⁵⁴Tom Odom, correspondence with the author, 15 March 2004, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Odom, a member of the DSSG, confirms that the group was formed explicitly to counter interpretations of the war arising from the GWAPS.

⁵⁵Scales, 368.

⁵⁶Ibid., 360.

⁵⁷Ibid. Similar arguments are found in T. R. Fehrenbach, *This Kind of War* (New York: Macmillan, 1963) and Charles Heller and William Stofft, ed, *America's First Battles* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986).

⁵⁸Ibid., 370.

⁵⁹LtCol Charles Cureton, *With the 1st Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993); LtCol Dennis

Mroczkowski, *With the 2nd Marine Division in Desert Shield and Desert Storm* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993); and Colonel Charles Quilter, *With the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force in Desert Shield and Desert Storm* ((Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993);

⁶⁰Cureton, 1-6, for one example.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 65, 114.

⁶²The vast majority of USMC works on the Gulf War are first person accounts of combat, with scant attention paid to organizational comparisons. The only exception is an underlying message of elitism compared to the Army that has long been a staple of Marine history. See David Morris, *Storm on the Horizon: The Battle of Khafji* (New York: Free Press, 2004); Anthony Swofford, *Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War* (New York, Scribner, 2003) and Phillip Thompson, *Into the Storm: A U.S. Marine in the Persian Gulf War* (Boston: McFarland and Company, 2001).

⁶³Gordon and Trainor, 168-177, 473. Trainor notes that General Schwartzkopf resisted most service parochialism by the CENTCOM Army planners, but even then there was active resistance to giving the Marines a leading role in the war.

⁶⁴John Quinn and Jack Schulimson, "U.S. Marine Operations in the Persian Gulf War, 1990-1991," in *The Eagle in the Desert*, ed. William Head and Earl Tilford (Westport: Praeger, 1996), 202.

⁶⁵J. Robert Moskin, *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*, 3d ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1992), 801.

⁶⁶Andrew Lambert, "The Naval War," in *The Gulf War Assessed*, ed. John Pimlott and Stephen Badsey (London: Arms and Armour, 1992), 125

⁶⁷Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, *The US Navy in Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991), v-vi.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, v.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 36-39.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 56.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 52.

⁷²Edward Marolda and Robert Schneller Jr., *Shield and Sword: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, DC: Naval Historical Center, 1998), xv.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 184-185, 246, 373-375.

⁷⁴Marvin Pokrant, *Desert Storm at Sea: What the Navy Really Did* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), ix-xii.

CHAPTER 6

TO WHAT END MILITARY HISTORY

The armed forces look upon history as a treasure chest, as crown jewels, that must remain in the control of the service. Yes, they want the truth; yes, they want the integrity of the record; but they also want history written from a service perspective.

Richard Kohn, *The Practice of Military History in the U.S. Government*

The careful analysis of official military histories and trusted agent accounts of Desert Storm bears out the claim that the practice of using history for organizational gain continued in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War. Though the effectiveness of their historical campaigns might have varied, none of the services was content to let its contributions to the war be defined by the others. Nor did the ostensibly factual account presented to Congress in the *Final Report* avoid the impact of political considerations and pressures. These facts alone cut against any argument that official military history represents an objective, academic pursuit. Instead, selective historical interpretation is a political tool wielded to greater or lesser effect by each of the services.

While rarely expressed in scholarly studies of the military, however, mine is hardly a novel observation. Complaints about the abuses of history are as old as the study of military history itself. In 1959, no less renowned an historian than B. H. Liddell Hart questioned whether officers raised in and loyal to a military institution could ever produce a historical work free of parochialism and distortion.¹ Oxford historian Michael Howard took a similarly dim view of military history, coining the term ‘nursery history’ to describe the mass of official historical works that selectively emphasized a particular service’s accomplishments specifically for inculcating future members into the

organization's culture.² What I believe this study adds to the debate is a better understanding of the role of history in the organizational tactics of the military, along with an appreciation for how commonplace, if unstated, parochial historiography has become in the American armed forces.

In a 1993 memoir on his pentagon experiences, former defense official James Burton claimed:

The moment the Gulf War ended, the time-honored custom of Pentagon political posturing resumed. Various Department of Defense teams were formed to document lessons learned during the war: what happened, which weapon systems and ideas worked, and which did not. These efforts quickly turned into "Can you top this?" contests between the revisionists of each service, as they massaged the data and tried to prove that their respective services deserved the lion's share of credit for the victory.³

However, this observation captures only a part of the larger picture. As this study has attempted to demonstrate, whether one looks at periods of peace or conflict, hot or cold war, declining or expanding budgets, the armed forces of the United States have grown increasingly sensitive to the impact of history on their organizational goals, and in some cases, survival. Selective historical interpretation has been part and parcel of service efforts to influence decisions with a political impact on the organization in the United States since the end of World War II, if not before.

The practice extends to what I have characterized as trusted agent accounts as well. Each of the services has turned on occasion to those outside of the organization, whether recently retired officers or carefully selected scholars and pundits, to represent desired views on the historical front. In fact, of the two sources of history, it is that of the trusted agent that tends to take the greatest editorial liberties, exaggerating the accomplishments of the host service, slighting the contributions of the other services, and

generally sacrificing balanced analysis in order to portray a favored organization in the best possible light. It is also quite likely that trusted agent accounts, rather than official military history, hold greater sway over the perceptions of political elites. As historian Richard Kohn has suggested, both the academic credentials and general popularity of official history frequently pale in comparison to that of the trusted agents.⁴

Even these pseudo-official accounts, though, tend to adopt the approach to history of their sponsoring organizations. Scholars cooperating with the more politically aggressive services, such as the Air Force, have leaned towards sweeping claims and harsher inter-service comparisons. Those writing for more conservative services like the Army and Navy generally produced inward-looking accounts, sensitive to the appearance of parochialism and unwilling to make unfavorable inter-service comparisons. One needs only to spend a day reading Hallion's *Storm over Iraq* and Scales' *Certain Victory* or Pokrant's *Desert Storm at Sea* back to back to experience the differences firsthand. While not all trusted agent history adheres to this pattern, it is interesting that the most widely read and cited studies do seem to follow this trend.

As this study has also attempted to make clear, differences observed between the various service interpretations of the Gulf War are consistent with long-standing organizational trends. In keeping with the simple caricatures of the armed forces presented by Carl Builder in *The Masks of War*, each organization's approach to history does seem to be informed by its organizational essence and colored by a fluctuating perception of threat from the external political environment. Whether political danger to an organization's core tasks originates from the government, the other services, or simply as a phantom in the minds of its senior leadership seems almost immaterial. In some

ways, changes in threat perception may partially explain the historical trends observed in the respective services (See Figure 1). Traditionally conservative organizations like the Army and Navy gravitate towards critical self-assessments of their performance, frequently to the point of excess. These are the same services whose ultimate existence has usually been perceived as most secure. For the Army, fluctuations in end strength have long been the norm. Similarly, given the United States' traditional status as a maritime power, the notion of disbanding the Navy seems most unlikely. As a result, periodic pressures in the political arena are less likely to be perceived as genuine dangers to these two organizations.

On the other extreme, the Air Force and Marines are less concerned with self-assessment, focusing instead on history for what it can offer to advance claims of organizational elitism or strategic dominance. These are the same services that have had to struggle for autonomy and survival. It seems reasonable to presume that the troubled past of the latter two organizations produced an organizational culture much more sensitive to potential political threats and more willing to sanction an aggressive defense of its interests in the political sphere. With one important exception, this pattern certainly held true throughout the 1990s.

As we have seen, after Desert Storm the Army continued to focus almost exclusively inwardly, hesitant to criticize the sister services, and generally limiting its analysis to ground operations at the operational and tactical levels.⁵ The only consistent political message in post-Desert Storm Army history dealt with the glorious triumph over the ghosts of the Vietnam War, a powerful message to be sure but one of dubious value outside of the service itself. The Air Force, on the other hand, made sweeping claims

about the effectiveness of airpower, suggesting revolutionary changes in the future of warfare. Citing the same body of evidence examined by the other services, the Air Force was nonetheless able to conclude that “the coalition's victory came from the wise and appropriate application of air power.”⁶ This explicitly parochial interpretation conformed to past practice, tracing its origins back to the Strategic Bombing Survey conducted after World War II, which Air Force leaders had hoped would validate airpower as the decisive force in the conflict, securing an independent and autonomous future for the organization.⁷ After the 1999 war in Kosovo, airpower advocates continued the trend, with many in the Air Force contending that experiences in the Balkans validated the claims made after Desert Storm about the ability to fight and win wars with airpower alone.⁸

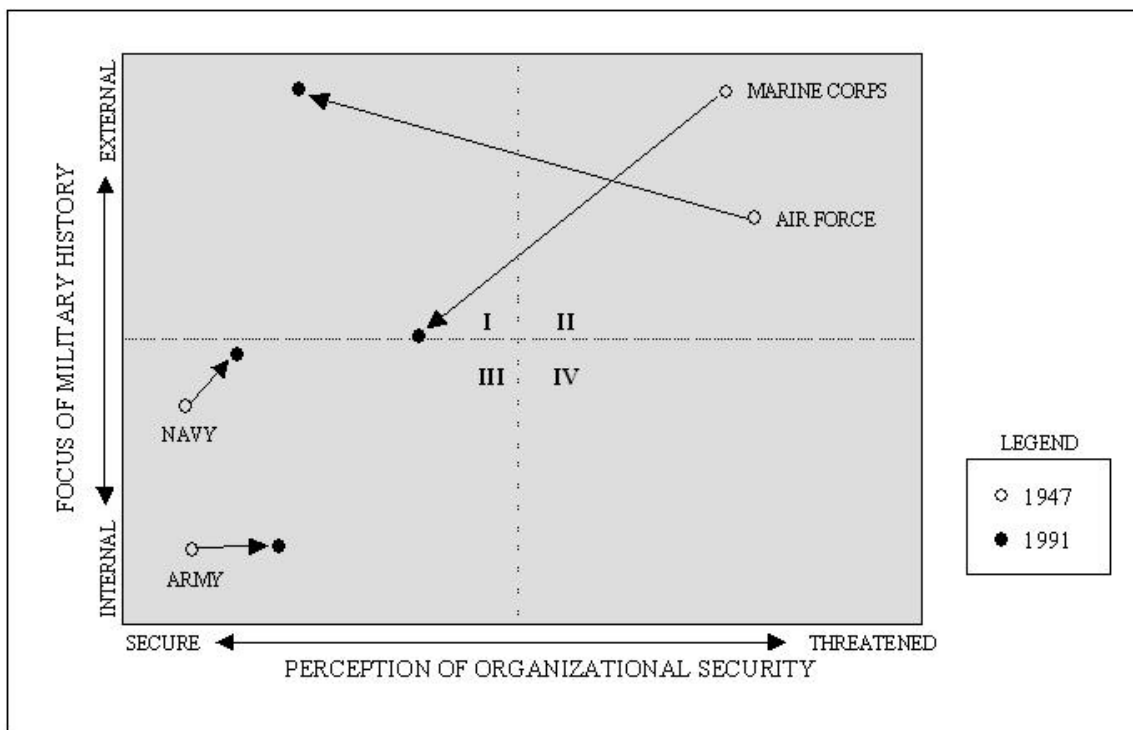


Figure 1. General Approaches to History (1947-1991)

Of all the services, only the Marine Corps failed to behave exactly as it had in the past. Unlike the official histories that followed both World War II and Korea, Marine Corps accounts of Desert Storm generally avoided direct criticism of the other services. This was a clear break from past practice. Histories of the Marines after previous wars deliberately emphasized the fighting spirit and elite nature of the Marine Corps compared to the Army.⁹ Even after decades of legislative security, however, there remain subtle indications that the Marine Corps continues to perceive itself as “an organizational David among Goliaths.”¹⁰

While generally more subdued, both official USMC histories and those of its trusted agents continue to glamorize the fighting spirit of the individual Marine. This particular emphasis is very much in keeping with the Marine Corps’ traditional use of history as a tool for perpetuating its unique organizational culture, both inside and outside the service. The Marines also favored accounts of ground combat in their histories of Desert Storm, conveniently overlooking the strategically vital but decidedly less glamorous deception amphibious landing conducted off the coast of Kuwait City. Though a different approach to history than the other services, this practice represents a viable and apparently quite effective organizational tactic for the Marines.

In general, each of the military services seems to believe that future political decisions will hinge, at least in part, on perceptions of past performance. The length they will go to leverage history and influence elite perceptions of their performance depends partly upon factors common to all government bureaucracies and partly upon factors unique to each organization. As each of the services transition from periods of relative security to apparent instability, their overarching organizational strategy becomes more

proactive. In the context of official history, services that perceive a threat to their organizational essence, whether from a competitor poaching on core tasks or from a looming reallocation of funds, roles or missions, present much more parochial interpretations of their past achievements. They are also more likely to promote trusted agent accounts that advance organizational interests at the expense of potential competitors. Military services secure in their political standing, whether because they enjoy favored status or are simply unaware of a looming threat, are more reactive. Their histories tend to be introspective, polite, and consciously inoffensive. However, this explanation is incomplete.

As this analysis of official and unofficial military histories has shown, there is an unexplored cultural component at work. More specifically, while the respective service positions towards history continued in much the same vein as they had past years, the incentive structure that had once explained this behavior had changed. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of the Army. Arguably more threatened than the other services by claims that airpower alone can win future wars, and lacking the legislative protection of the Marine Corps, the theory of organizational politics predicts that the Army should have engaged in aggressive self-promotion after Desert Storm. However, it is at this juncture that theory, based as it is upon a bureaucratic model of government organization devoid of military culture, parts way with reality. While senior Army leaders perceived the danger inherent in such claims, and indeed set about refuting many of the airpower advocates' arguments, they refused to sanction aggressive attacks at odds with the spirit of jointness currently pervading the defense establishment. In effect, the Army leadership apparently decided that maintaining an aura of cooperation with the other

services outweighed any gains to be made by directly contradicting even their most threatening claims.

At the other end of the spectrum, a similar disconnect between theory and reality exists in the case of the Air Force. During the Air Force's determined struggle for independence from the Army, incentives to leverage history for all its worth as part of the larger organizational campaign were all too real. Today, however, the Air Force is arguably the least threatened of the armed services. Noted scholars have argued that airpower, with its promise of precision wars waged without the risk of friendly casualties, now represents the military service of choice for politicians contemplating the use of force.¹¹ Under these conditions, the Air Force should have acted much less aggressively towards its sister services, a hypothesis validated by the visible shift towards moderation seen in the actions of the similarly secure Marine Corps. Yet, despite an enviable organizational position and relatively smaller interests at stake (as compared to sheer organizational survival), the Air Force waged an extremely aggressive political campaign after the Persian Gulf War.

None of this behavior is consistent with a political theory that explains organizational actions as a function of external pressures. Instead, it points to the importance of considering organizational culture as a variable co-equal with political incentives in explaining the behavior of the modern US armed forces. Though outside the bounds of this particular study, gaining an appreciation for the sources and effect of organizational culture in the US armed forces certainly merits future research.

The Question of Effectiveness: A Topic for Further Study

Arguments about the manipulation of history aside, one critical question remains unanswered by this study. Do political leaders use official military history as the basis for their decisions at all? Recent works openly question whether our elected leaders have the time or the inclination to read any history in the context of the original conditions under which the events occurred. In *Making War, Thinking History*, Jeffrey Record laments how American presidents seem to haphazardly pick and choose from the past in search of analogies to justify the use of force to the American people.¹² Richard Neustadt and Ernest May's widely acclaimed *Thinking in Time: The Use of History for Decision-Makers* offers a framework for properly applying history to current events at least in part to offset what the authors perceive as political elites improperly interpreting historical events for political expediency.¹³

Evidence that decision makers are as fickle in their use of history as the military often seems to be when writing it makes the issue of selective interpretation and historical parochialism on the part of the services much less relevant. In effect, if elected leaders use history simply to buttress their own personal predispositions rather than to gain a better understanding of past lessons, then any service which produces history specifically for political consumption is wasting its time. There is clearly no shortage of historical examples waiting to be selected out of context to serve as justification for future decisions.

However, should this rather cynical view be disproved, it still remains to be seen whether official military history is a primary influence on American political elites as they confront difficult strategic decisions. Currently available polling data does not reveal

which sources of information American political leaders turn to as the basis for their perceptions of the US armed forces. America's civilian elites can draw from a multitude of sources to develop their views of military accomplishments, ranging from the mass media to congressional testimony by the Service Chiefs to personal experience (though in steadily shrinking numbers). The impact of military history relative to these other sources of information must be determined to place the findings of this and similar studies into the proper context.

Specific Recommendations for the United States Army

Finally, if the trends identified in this study are accurate, and future research bears out the claim that official and trusted agent histories of the military do serve as important forces in shaping strategic decisions, the Army faces unique challenges in the historical arena. As a consequence of its organizational culture, the Army often fails to respond as aggressively as the other services to perceived political threats. In Army culture, overt political behavior is properly deemed unprofessional, undermining cooperation between the services necessary in warfare. As a result, Army histories are consistently works of self-assessment that avoid the sort of harsh inter-service comparisons common to the modern Air Force and the Marine Corps in an earlier time. The practical benefits of the Army's critical operational analyses for future generations of leaders are obvious.¹⁴ However, narrowly adhering to this organizational practice increasingly places the Army in a disadvantaged position.

The Navy, closest to the Army in its traditional view of history as a practical, rather than political, instrument recently published an article in the Naval War College Review calling for a renewed emphasis on maritime history. In this article, author John

Hattendorf contends that American political leaders require a naval historical program of “specific information and interpretation focused on particular elements of maritime history in ways that provide insight into current debates over funding, policy making, and joint service operational and technical planning.”¹⁵ Neglecting the needs of this political constituency can only be done “at great cost.”¹⁶ In Hattendorf’s view, the result is that policy decisions are made in a historical vacuum with no appreciation for the lessons of the past. As this study has attempted to demonstrate, however, the much greater danger is that the other military services will fill that gap, interpreting history in ways more amenable to their own parochial needs.

In summary, the sort of objective self-assessment that defines Army history arguably produces a much better fighting force for the nation, but self-imposed insularity comes at a cost. Without an aggressive information campaign or a widely read study like the GWAPS, Army positions can be underrepresented in the political debate, with lasting consequences. For example, more extensive public arguments about the shortcomings of the air campaign in the Gulf War, impressive though it was, might have dampened the expectations for airpower in the subsequent Balkan campaigns. Similarly, aggressively highlighting the need for more responsive close air support after Desert Storm might have shifted funds away from developing the F-22 and towards less glamorous, but just as vital ground support aircraft.

Ultimately, Army culture will be slow to change, if it should change at all. Perhaps the value in this and similar studies is simply in pointing out that the Army’s traditionally passive and insular approach to history does have real consequences. Though consistent with organizational views towards the political process, it frequently

allows the more politically active services to shape the political debate in ways that can cost the organization over the long run.

¹B.H. Liddell Hart, "Responsibility and Judgment in Historical Writing," *Military Review* 23 (spring 1959): 35-36.

²Howard, 10-11.

³James Burton, *The Pentagon Wars* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1993), 238-239. Burton specifically identifies claims by the Air Force about the wartime effectiveness of stealth aircraft that were used to further the argument for procuring more F-117s. He argues that these claims were later disproved, as both our allies and U.S. Navy ships were easily able to track the F-117s despite USAF claims to the contrary.

⁴Kohn, 134.

⁵Major General Robert Scales, telephone interview by author, 20 March 2004. MG Scales admitted that he directed Certain Victory to be an operational study of the war for use by future officers with minimal interservice comparisons in the spirit of joint cooperation.

⁶Air Force News Agency, U.S. Air Force, *Reaching Globally, Reaching Powerfully: The United States Air Force in the Gulf War, A Report*, September 1991..

⁷Kohn, 123.

⁸Most frequently cited is the 10,000-page overview of the Kosovo Air Campaign written by BG John Corley. See also Scott Cooper, "Airpower and the Coercive Use of Force," *The Washington Quarterly* 24 (autumn 2001): 81-92.

⁹For striking examples drawn from the Korean Conflict, see Andrew Geer, *The New Breed: The Story of U.S. Marines in Korea* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952) and more recently Edwin Hoyt, *The Pusan Perimeter* (New York, Stein and Day, 1984); Martin Russ, *Breakout: The Chosin Reservoir Campaign* (New York: Fromm International, 1999). Even official histories of this period emphasize individual fighting spirit over operational assessments. See Lynn Montross and Nicholas Canzona, *U.S. Marine Operations in Korea, The Pusan Perimeter*, vol.1 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1954).

¹⁰Moskin, 433.

¹¹Eliot Cohen, "The Mystique of U.S. Air Power," *Foreign Affairs* 73 (January-February 1994): 109-24.

¹²Jeffrey Record, *Making War, Thinking History: Munich, Vietnam, and Presidential Uses of Force from Korea to Kosovo* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002).

¹³Richard Neustadt and Ernest May, *Thinking in Time: The Use of History for Decision-Makers* (New York: The Free Press, 1988).

¹⁴Roger Spiller, "Armies in History, History in Armies," in *A Century of Service: 100 Years of the Australian Army*, ed. Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (Canberra: Army History Unit, 2001), 1-11.

¹⁵John Hattendorf, "The Uses of Maritime History in and for the Navy," *Naval War College Review* 56 (spring 2003): 23.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

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